

DEFIANT LOVES

From
the vast Amazon jungle
the great mansions
of Rio . . . A breathless
saga of revenge and
forbidden
desires



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by **DANIEL ADAMS**
author of **BROTHERS AND ENEMIES**



They Were Heirs and Enemies, Lovers and Renegades

Richard Grant: His birth had made him heir to a great shipping empire, but love made him an outlaw to family and heritage and king, and drove him to claim a different legacy, deep in the Amazon jungle.

Anne de Carvalho: Bound by royalty and tradition to a cruel husband, she alone could lure Richard from his jungle paradise.

Oranatoon: He was a slave, and Anne de Carvalho owned him body and soul. But he swore one day to make her freely and truly his.

Félicité de Coimbra: A Portuguese princess, forever searching for dangerous new pleasures, forever desiring Richard Grant.

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Richard hesitated outside the door, listening to the pounding of his heart. What a mess he had made of things, a decade ago. If only he had been the man then that he was now.

He turned the knob, stepped into the room. Anne sat on a settee in the far corner, idly turning the pages of a book. She turned her head, and stared at him.

"Anne." He took a step forward. She had not changed, was still the most voluptuously desirable woman he had ever seen.

"Richard?" She stood up, looked from side to side as if she wanted to escape. "My God, *Richard*? How long have you been in Rio?"

"Just two weeks," he said. "No one told you?"

She clutched her fingers together. "If you have been back two weeks, *you* must have been told many things."

"That is why I had to see you."

Her mouth twisted. "Why? It is all true, whatever you have been told. There is no need for anyone to make up stories about me!"

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by *DANIEL ADAMS*



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Except where identified historically, the characters in this novel are invented, and are not intended to represent actual persons.

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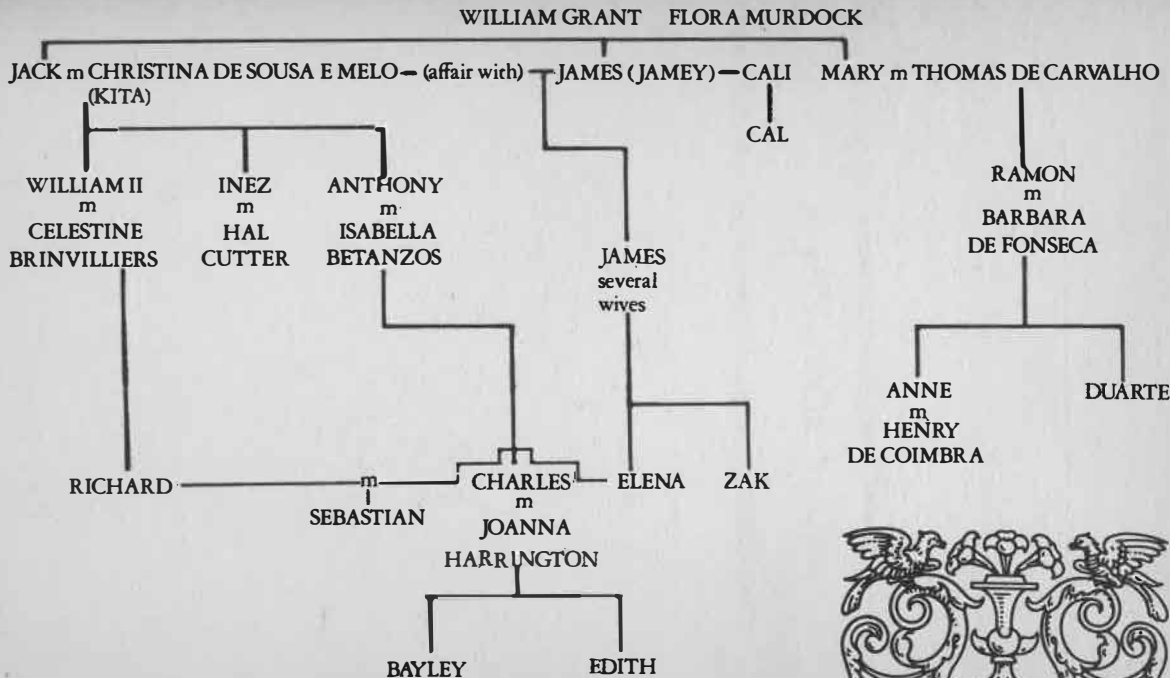
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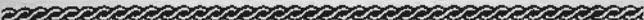
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Defiant Loves





PART ONE



Chapter 1

A banging on the door awoke Charles Grant, had him sitting up so suddenly and violently that Magdalena fell from his arms and rolled across the mattress, only just checking herself from sleepily falling out of bed.

The pale light licking at the windowpane suggested that it was just dawn, but the bedroom remained dark. Charles Grant blinked, pushed straight black hair from his eyes. "Who is it?"

"It is Manuel, Senor Grant. Manuel. Senor Grant—" His excited panting could be heard through the door. Charles Grant looked down at the woman beside him, threw the sheet over her naked plumpness, got out of bed, and draped a robe around his own shoulders.

That he was a Grant would have been immediately obvious to any casual observer of Rio de Janeiro society; he was tall and broad-shouldered and had the craggy good looks of his Scottish-American forebears, his features softened only slightly by his Brazilian mother. But he possessed the lithe movements of a Latin, or at least of someone born and raised in the tropics, and he made not a sound as he crossed the room and unlocked the door.

"Senor Grant..." The mestizo servant's gaze drifted past his master to the woman in the bed, then hastily looked up at the strong features above him. "Senor Grant..."

"You are babbling, Manuel," Charles Grant said. "What has happened?"

Manuel noisily sucked air into his lungs. "There is a fleet, *senor*. A great fleet..." He looked over his shoulder as if expecting to see ships sailing up the stairs behind him. Charles, more practical, recrossed the room in three strides to throw open the *jalousies* guarding the window and look out.

Charles preferred to reside in Rio de Janeiro itself, rather than on the Grant estate several miles out of town, at Copacabana. Since his mother was dead and his father lived five thousand miles away, managing the Lisbon office of the company, and since he knew that his Uncle William as well as his grandparents did not altogether approve of him, he had no inclination to live with the rest of the family; in town he was his own master, able to pursue his own amusements, such as Magdalena, without fear of a censorious frown. And able to make his plans in peace. For Charles Grant was a man who considered the future, and especially *his* future, with a great deal of care.

But as that future was inextricably bound up with the Grant Company in all its worldwide ventures, he had taken care to obtain rooms in a lodging house on the Rio waterfront. From there he overlooked not only the company offices and docks and warehouses, but also the huge lagoon called Guanabara Bay, where the ships, several of them flying the distinctive Grant colors of blue and gold beside the red and green of Portugal, lay quietly at anchor, shrouded in the thin mist that hovered over the water. At dawn on this January morning in the Year of Our Lord 1808, the harbor was peacefully somnolent. There *were* signs of awakening, though; he could see men gathering on the docks to chatter, and to left and right other *jalousies* were opening to reveal women leaning out, black pigtailed drooping past their pale brown faces. They peered at the narrow passage that led from the bay and between the tree-clad hills into the open Atlantic.

From his vantage point, the expanse looked empty, although there was no saying what the looming bulk of the hill called Pão de Açúcar—the Loaf of Sugar—might be hiding.

"A fleet?" he asked Manuel. "What fleet?" Portugal was at peace with all the world, no matter what upheavals might be happening in Europe as the Emperor Napoleon sought to impose his will upon the entire continent.

"An English fleet, *senor*," Manuel explained, having regained his breath, and sidling further into the room to obtain

a closer look at the voluptuous Magdalena.

Charles turned to face him. "You are babbling again." Great Britain was Portugal's oldest and staunchest ally.

"It is true, senor." Manuel had reached the foot of the bed—could have touched, had he dared, the little pink toes that had escaped the sheet. "A fast sloop made the harbor but an hour ago. The English fleet comes from Lisbon, senor. It is bringing the queen, and the regent, and all the royal family. And senor . . ."

It occurred to Charles that the little man must be drunk. "The queen? The regent? Leaving Portugal, to come to Brazil? Manuel, you had best explain, or I shall break my stick on your back."

Manuel was having trouble with his breathing again. "It is true, senor. That is the message the sloop has brought. The French, senor! Napoleon! He has invaded Portugal. His armies have marched across Spain—the Spaniards let them do it, senor; would you believe it? But they have marched across Spain, and then across Portugal. It is all lost, senor. All."

"My God!" Charles sat on the edge of the bed. He felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach. And yet . . . had they not known that it must happen one day? Not content with being Great Britain's only remaining ally on the continent of Europe, little Portugal had also had the effrontery to defy the emperor's blockade. With all Europe groaning for lack of imports, and lack of markets for its exports, Lisbon had remained a lifeline to the world, a lifeline along which the Grant Company ships had flowed. How could Napoleon permit that state of affairs to continue indefinitely?

But, if the French had taken Lisbon, one of their principal objectives would have been the Grant Company office.

"My father," he said.

"He is with the fleet, senor," Manuel said. "That is what I wish to tell you. Your father will be home. This evening, they say. Or tomorrow, at the least."

"Thank God for that," Charles said. And then frowned again. "Richard," he muttered. "He must have been with the army."

"Your cousin is also with the fleet, senor," Manuel said.

"You're sure?" Charles asked. "He should have been with the army."

"Senor Richard is with the fleet, senor. That is what I was told."

"Aye," Charles said, half to himself. "He would be." He

went to his dressing table, picked up a gold coin, and flipped it across the room; Manuel caught it expertly. "You have done well, Manuel," Charles said. "Now get out. I wish to dress."

"Yes, senor. Yes." Manuel backed across the room, and received an even greater reward than the coin—Magdalena was sitting up, and the sheet was sliding to her waist.

She barely waited for the door to close behind the servant before leaping out of bed to hug her lover. "The French have captured Portugal? An entire country? Just like that? It is not possible!"

"It is entirely possible." Charlie shrugged her free and began to dress. "It would be like a lion deciding on a deer for breakfast."

Her fingers ate into his shoulder. "But what will happen now? What will happen to Brazil?"

He glanced down at her, then used his free hand to ruffle her mass of curling brown hair. "If you mean, will Napoleon now send an army across the ocean to capture us as well, I don't think that's very likely. He got himself well and truly bitten when he tried to reconquer Haiti a few years ago, remember?" He finally disengaged himself and knotted his cravat. "It could be quite interesting. To have the queen here, and the regent . . . Rio will be the new capital of the empire. Quite interesting." He winked. "And now I won't have to go and help Papa in the Lisbon office. There was talk of that, you know. I'd say we were in for an exciting time, Magdalena my sweet. If only that lout Richard had got his head shot off, as he should have . . ."

Magdalena sat on the bed, hands dangling between her knees. "Why do you hate your cousin so much, Charlie?"

Charles Grant frowned into the mirror. "What makes you think I hate him?"

She shrugged. "Everything you say. Every time you speak of him. I do not understand, my Charlie. He is younger than you. How can he harm you?"

Charles came back across the room to sit beside her. "*Our* ages have nothing to do with it, Magdalena, my sweet. It is the ages of our fathers that matter. I am the son of a younger brother. Whereas Richard is the son of Uncle William, heir to the company. Heir to everything." His voice suddenly took on a brittle harshness.

Magdalena pouted, her finger tracing little designs on his

arm. "I have heard it said that William Grant is not truly the heir, because he is not truly the eldest son."

For a moment Charles's expression was almost frightening. But he supposed she was only repeating standard Rio gossip. Even he did not know if there was any substance to it. Had Grandpa Jack Grant fathered three children, or four? No one could be quite sure. There had certainly been an older brother, named James, who had been kidnapped by the uncle for whom he was named. Along with his mother, Christina, he had been taken up the Amazon, where the first James Grant had founded a second Grant empire out there in the wilderness. And that first James Grant had claimed to be the boy's father, and by the same woman, Christina, whom his brother Jack had later married. But such a family skeleton was kept firmly locked in its closet, never mentioned except by Christina—whom everyone called Kita—herself. And she was a law unto herself, not only because of her adventures and her personality, but because she had been born Christina Maria Theresa de Sousa e Melo, cousin of the queen of Portugal, before her so strange marriage to an American adventurer.

Lesser mortals, such as her grandchildren, must rest content with the facts, that the younger James Grant had preferred to remain up the Amazon, as governor, had allowed his younger brother William—or was he truly his half-brother?—to inherit the company, had accepted that it was William's son Richard, rather than his own mestizo children, to whom the Grant fortune would eventually pass. And that was all that mattered.

"Richard is the heir," he said. "And he wished to play at being a soldier. Instead of running away, he should have stayed and fought. And been killed. That's what soldiers are for. To be killed."

"It is true." William Grant perused his brother's letter for the third time. "Portugal has fallen. It is hard to believe."

He raised his head to stare anxiously at his wife. But then, his was a characteristically anxious face, sitting ill on the tall and powerful frame. Célestine Grant thought it absurd that so dynamic a union as that of Jack and Christina Grant could have managed to produce two such spineless sons as her own husband William and his brother Anthony. Or was that merely nature's way of evening the scales?

Far more likely, she had decided early in their married life,

it was the result of living for so long in the shadow of their father, of having to *preserve* an empire rather than build one. And the Grant Company *was* an empire, in every sense. An empire built upon the sea, by the energy and determination and courage of Jack Grant, an empire that in this second generation reached out to every corner of the globe. An empire to which this man was the heir.

And she was his wife.

Her eyes gleamed. "Napoleon's victory was inevitable. Sooner or later."

He raised his head, and she flushed. Célestine Brinvilliers had been born and bred in New Orleans, and had met her future husband when he had visited Louisiana to study the French methods of growing sugar, in an attempt to discover where Brazilians might profitably improve their science. That had been before anyone named Bonaparte, or even anyone named Robespierre, had ever been heard of, when the French world, or at least that part of it inhabited by the wealthy, had been a joyous, happy place in which to live. Yet, despite all the years that had passed since then, Célestine felt an insensible pride in the present prowess of French arms, even when commanded by the usurper.

But that was not something her husband could be expected to understand. She often thought that there were times he did not even understand how she had come to be his wife. Yet it was simple enough. That Célestine Brinvilliers, tall and slender, black-haired and starkly handsome, the best horsewoman and the best dancer in Louisiana, should choose to accept the hand of some Brazilian-American shipowner-cum-planter, and remove herself several thousand miles south of the Equator, had no doubt raised many eyebrows. But that the daughter of Louisiana's wealthiest planter should be married off to the eldest son of Brazil's wealthiest magnate was an entirely understandable piece of family management. Personal feelings had not been allowed to enter the matter at all.

And whatever her feelings about the marriage, Célestine Grant had fitted perfectly into the life of Rio, and of her new family. While the marriage had produced only one child, at least that child was a son—the heir, like his father, to the Grant empire.

"Read me Richard's letter again," she said.

William sighed, and picked up the other sheet of paper.

"His writing is too careless," he grumbled. "And when he writes in a hurry . . . 'I write in haste, Papa, Mama,'" he read. "'A sloop is being despatched ahead of the fleet to inform Rio that we are on our way, on a British warship, no less—I wonder if any man of the crew knows that it was ships like this one that first chased Grandpa from Nantucket to Brazil? But I am in the best of company. On the ship next to mine are the queen and the regent, and the princes. And with me on the *Bucentaure* are Prince Henry of Coimbra, and his sister Princess Félicité, and Anne de Carvalho, and Uncle Anthony, who I know is also writing you by this packet."

"You will assume, from the above, that all Portugal has taken to the sea. And so it has. All Portugal that could afford to do so. Were I to attempt to convey to you the sense of shame which I, at least, feel at having fled so precipitously, I should need a volume. What can I say, Papa? We thought ourselves soldiers. Prince Henry did, at any rate, and I volunteered to serve with his university dragoons. When the call came, we rode to war. But Henry *would* dally on the way, and by the time we reached the army, the army was no more. It had been scattered at the first onrush of Junot's Moustaches, and we could do nothing more than flee with the rest. It is a sad business, to have fought and lost a war without ever hearing a shot.

"Yet I swear Portugal could have been defended, as it is now being defended—by the British. That is the greatest shame of all. I wish I could have stayed, and fought, even alongside the redcoats. I am on this ship under duress, so to speak, as Uncle Anthony, determined to abandon the Lisbon office, commanded me to accompany him. I would have you know these things, Papa, lest you feel I am no better than the rest.'" William Grant stopped reading. "Poor Richard," he said. "So determined a Yankee. And so impatient to prove himself a man."

"To prove himself a Grant," Célestine said. "And so he should be. But go on, Willie. It is the rest I wish to hear."

William cleared his throat and picked up the letter again. "'But as I am here, as the course of my life has been so abruptly and decisively altered, I will make the best of it. And there are compensations, in being able to return home two years sooner than I had anticipated, in being able to see you again, dear Mama and Papa, even if I will have no degree. But perhaps

I will have more. I write of recent events in a derogatory spirit, yet I am happy. Happier than I have ever been before, certainly than I deserve to be at this moment in history, because I am in love. Perhaps I have long been in love, without possessing the courage to admit it to myself, much less to the unfortunate object of my affection. But now, thrown together as we are by such circumstances, spending each day in the other's company, now at last I have been able to understand the impulses of my own heart, and to approach her in that spirit. Alas, she demurs. She accuses me of being too American, in my forceful, ungracious ways (as if that were not a compliment), reminds me that it is less a matter of our mutual affection than of the mutual agreement of our parents, and then smiles upon me to convince me that, in spite of all, the mutual affection is there. Can any man be more fortunate than I? Thus I write to you, dear Mama and Papa, to prepare you for my return, when we shall have so much to discuss, and plan, and hope. By the time you receive this letter the *Bucentaure's* hull will almost be visible on the horizon, and I shall be straining to be once again at your side."

"I sometimes think he should have been educated as a poet, rather than as a merchant," William Grant remarked.

"The boy is in love. Men in love are always poetical. Oh, I am so excited, William. It is what I had always hoped."

"That he should behave like some Yankee boor? Anyway, he has not even told us the lady's name. I find that significant."

"Oh, nonsense."

Célestine went to the front veranda and looked out across the road and the beach at the empty ocean. It had been Christina Grant's decision, some forty years ago, to build her house away from the hustle and bustle of Rio itself, on land overlooking the great sweep of white-sand beach that the Indians called Copacabana. From the windows of the Big House it was possible to look out at the Atlantic, and here, too, there was always a breeze, either southing in from the sea, or sucked out of the land by the early morning heat. The occasional inconvenience of a storm, which could send great rollers to pound the beach and hurl flying sandy spray even as far inland as the windows of the house, was entirely acceptable where there was so much beauty, and so much peace. And in the course of time, she had built a smaller version of the Grant mansion for each of the three children who had remained with her: for Anthony, the youngest, and his child bride, who had died so tragically

in delivering Charles; for Inez, the artistic prodigy whose paintings hung in the best salons in Europe, but who preferred to remain in the quiet backwater of Copacabana with her husband Hal Cutter, the grizzled sea captain who had lost his arm in Jack Grant's service; and finally, for William, when he had returned from North America with his French-American wife.

In time, indeed, many of the good people of Rio had come to appreciate the wisdom behind Christina's choice of site, and now there were other houses overlooking the beach. But none so fine as the Grants', or so large, and none close enough to encroach on the Grants' privacy, for about her houses Christina had created a vast estate, growing sugar and coffee for several miles inland, stabling horses and endeavoring ceaselessly to maintain the lawns and gardens that were her delight against the ravages of termites and insects and unpredictable weather alike.

And all held in trust, as Grandmother Kita readily agreed, for Richard. A Richard who was about to marry into the royal family itself.

"Well, who do you suppose can require such secrecy," William Grant demanded, following her, "if it is not some serving wench?"

"You do amaze me," Célestine said frostily. "Do you really have that low an estimate of your son? And of his intelligence? Why, he has told us the identity of the lucky girl, without presuming to identify her upon a sheet of paper which could well fall into vulgar hands. Now there is the mark of a true gentleman."

"He has told us her name?"

"Of course." Célestine ticked off the points on her fingers. "One, she is on the ship with him. Two, he has known her for years. Three, she is sufficiently a lady to realize that the matter cannot be decided by the pair of them. And four, he has actually mentioned her name in the letter, out of all the people who must be on board with him. So it has to be *Félicité de Coimbra*."

William frowned. "Prince Henry's sister?"

"Of course. I think it is a superb prospect."

"*Félicité de Coimbra*." William spoke half to himself. "Is she not reputed to be somewhat . . . well . . ."

"All the ladies-in-waiting at that court have acquired such reputations. The idle gossips have nothing better to occupy their time than in criticizing their betters."

"I suppose you are right," William agreed, without sounding convinced. "But . . . if it *is* a young lady at court, it could just as well be Anne de Carvalho. He mentions her name in his letter as well."

"Anne de Carvalho?" Célestine stared at her husband, and he recalled that his wife loathed the Carvalhos, who were also distant cousins of Grandmother Kita and who were the Grants' only possible social rivals in Rio. "I have never heard such nonsense in my life. I would not countenance such a suggestion for a moment. Anyway, Richard would never even consider such a match. Oh, you do so *annoy* me, sometimes, William. Félicité de Coimbra! The Princess Félicité! I wonder if she will retain the title after they are married. The Princess Grant! That would be splendid."

William Grant folded the letter and replaced it in its envelope. "She is only a princess by courtesy," he reminded his wife. "She is illegitimate."

"Oh, really, William. She is the granddaughter of a king. When one is the granddaughter of a king, it simply does not matter on which side of the blanket one happens to have been born. Give me those letters."

William surrendered them. "Where are you taking them?"

"Up to the Big House, of course. I wish to show them to Grandmother Kita. She will be absolutely delighted."

Christina Maria Theresa de Sousa e Melo Grant had been a legend for more than twenty years. She was a-niece of the late marquis de Pombal, the founder of such greatness as Portugal had ever possessed, and as a girl she alone had survived the destruction of her convent in the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. She had been kidnapped by her own brother-in-law, and forced to spend eight years living as an Indian a thousand miles up the Amazon River. Rumor had it that she had roamed the forest naked. Rumor said a great many more things about her than that, and she had never done anything to discourage rumor; her sons preferred to regard her as slightly mad, to be humored, and to be loved, but not to be taken very seriously.

Certainly, Célestine thought, a trifle enviously, she was even now a woman to make male hearts pound. Christina Grant's hair remained jet black, her features remained delicately exquisite, and her black eyes were as clear as when they had sought after fish in the brown waters of the Amazon. Her brain remained as sharp as a razor.

"A girl from court," she said. "There is a pity."

"A princess, Grandmother," Célestine said.

Christina Grant smiled. "You forget that I was raised at court, and it was a better court than poor mad Queen Maria's. Princesses are no different from any other girls."

"And would you condemn yourself, Grandmother?"

"Of course," Christina agreed, with her usual devastating honesty.

But Célestine's brain was just as sharp. "Yet you married Grandfather Jack, and made him happy, and helped him to build the company, and had fine sons and daughters. Princess Félicité will do the same for Richard. I know she will, no matter what her background."

Christina smiled at her daughter-in-law's enthusiasm. "We must hope and pray that she does, my dear. Assuming it comes to pass."

"We must *make* it come to pass, Grandmother," Célestine said, fiercely. "We can, if you will help me. I only met the dowager princess de Coimbra once, when William took me on that visit to Lisbon..." Her face twisted. She had hated the journey, as she had hated Portugal. And now that she came to remember, she recalled that she had hated the vulgar, immoral court most of all.

"Yes," Christina said. "She always gave herself airs. But you feel, now that she is a widow, fleeing for her life, she may be more amenable? Or," she added with her usual discernment, "have you changed your mind about her?"

"No," Célestine said. "Of course I have not changed my mind. But as you say, Grandmother, she will be more willing now to look upon commoners as her equals. And once they are in Brazil, even the royal family cannot fail to take heed of the Grants."

"I assure you, Célestine, that the regent at least is well aware of the support he obtains from the best creole families," Christina said gently. "He was perfectly willing to find Anne de Carvalho a place at court for the completion of her education."

Célestine snorted. "I did not come here to discuss the Carvalho girl, Grandmother," she said. "I cannot understand, anyway, why *she* was given a place, while Richard was not."

Christina smiled patiently. "Because Richard went to Portugal to study, my dear, not to turn a card or raise a skirt. Jack would have none of that."

"Of course," Célestine said quietly. Grandfather Jack's word

was law. "Anyway," she continued brightly, "if the young couple truly do love each other—and Richard certainly suggests that they do—we must do all we can to help them realize their ambitions. *Will* you help them, Grandmother?"

Christina gazed at the younger woman for several seconds. "Of course I shall help them, if it is what they wish, my dear," she said. "If it is what Richard truly wishes." She smiled. "It will be so good to have him home again. Even Jack will be pleased, I think."

"You *think*?" Célestine cried. No one could doubt that Richard was Jack Grant's favorite grandson. At least, *she* had never doubted it. The thought of his ever incurring the displeasure of his grandfather was too terrifying to be considered.

Christina continued to smile, pleased with her little joke, which had so rapidly punctured Célestine's bubble of self-important energy. "You know Jack, my dear. He growled, 'Coming home? What a to-do—and with his studies not completed.' But his eyes were twinkling. Oh, what *is* that noise? Today has been nothing but comings and goings."

The hooves thundered on the drive, scattered to a halt. Only seconds later booted feet drummed on the stairs. Célestine opened the boudoir door to look out. "It is Charles," she said contemptuously.

Charles Grant panted to a halt before his aunt, looked past her at Christina. "Grandma!" he cried. "You have heard the news?"

"Several hours ago, Charlie," Christina said. "You really should try rising earlier."

"I..." He bit his lip. "They will be here tomorrow," he said.

"Tomorrow?" Christina inquired. "By this evening, we were told."

He shook his head. "The wind has dropped. They cannot possibly make it before tomorrow."

"Oh, dear," Christina said. "Your grandfather will be *so* annoyed. He went into town the moment he heard the news."

"I have seen Grandpa," Charles said. "It was he who sent me out here to tell you. And to tell you that he will be returning for supper. But Grandmother, think of it—the queen, and the regent, the entire royal family—the entire government of Portugal will be landing in Rio tomorrow!"

"And Richard," Célestine said.

Charles glanced at her. "Why, of course, Aunt Célestine," he said. "Richard, too. The family paragon. I can hardly wait to see him again." He glanced at his grandmother, flushed, and left the room.

Chapter 2



"There we are." Captain Cary handed his sextant to his midshipman, made a note on his pad, and consulted his almanac. "I can assure you, gentlemen, that Rio de Janeiro is not seventy miles away, over there." He pointed west, the direction in which the vast fleet was heading, where the empty blue line of the horizon was only now becoming discernible as the sun rose behind them out of the equally empty ocean. "If the breeze holds, we should be there tomorrow."

"If the breeze holds," Prince Henry of Coimbra said in disgust. "Fifty-seven days." He stood at the gunwale, slapping his gloved hands together; he was not by habit an early riser, and had only come up this morning because his friend Richard Grant had promised him a first sight of Brazil.

The Prince was a rather small man, and even at twenty-two was inclined to plumpness, while his pale skin and yellow hair were more suggestive of the British sailors by whom he was surrounded than of a member of the Portuguese royal house. What dignity he possessed was conferred by the uniform he wore on every occasion. He had designed it himself, as colonel and founder of the Sintra Dragoons. His blue jacket was fronted with gold braid and shouldered with crimson epaulettes, presently concealed by the crimson cape that protected him from the dawn chill, and which matched the crimson breeches with the broad yellow stripe down each leg. To come on deck he

had even donned his shako, which was black, trimmed in gold braid, and surmounted by an enormous white plume. His boots were also black, and his belt and gloves white leather. Standing on the snow-white deck of the British man-of-war, surrounded by blue-jacketed seamen, he suggested some flamboyant tropical bird, being taken captive to grace a foreign zoo.

As undoubtedly, Richard Grant thought, he so considered himself. The prince of Coimbra was born and bred in Portugal and had never seen Brazil. Had never even thought of it, until that tumultuous day two months ago when they had embarked, leaving their followers behind. Richard's mouth twisted bitterly at this last thought. Henry was a prince, and *he* was a Grant—both too precious to be surrendered to the French.

Richard had discarded *his* uniform immediately on boarding, and now wore the dark coat and trousers of a gentleman. His black hair was ruffled by the dawn breeze. Richard was actually a distant relative of the prince, but it was his Scottish blood and his American heritage that were easily discernible in the tall, powerful frame, the rugged features. And indeed, a distant relationship to the Portuguese royal house was Richard Grant's least claim to fame; this tall young man was Jack Grant's eventual heir, and he would one day be the wealthiest man in the entire Portuguese Empire, it was estimated, for all that it was his family's custom to retain and proclaim their American nationality. Yet Richard wore his prospects well, possessing an easy confidence rather than the slightest trace of arrogance, combined with a far more thoughtful approach to life than his friend's.

Now he smiled as he clapped Prince Henry on the shoulder. "Brazil will still be there tomorrow, Henry."

"Fifty-seven days." Richard's uncle, Anthony Grant, stood beside them. "That is not so very long. I'll wager when you crossed three years ago it took much longer, Richard."

"Indeed it did, Uncle Anthony. Sixty-five days. But that was going *to* Europe, with headwinds the entire way."

"Sixty-five days," Prince Henry growled, "of drifting around this endless ocean, seeing the same old faces every day and all day. Why, even a storm would be welcome, to clear the air and provide some excitement."

And no doubt send you scurrying for your bunk in fright, Richard thought contemptuously. He was only a few months younger than the prince, but because Portugal, and especially

life at the royal court, had been so strange to the gauche young creole, he had looked up to this man as almost an idol throughout their university careers. He had been prepared to forgive his petulance, his hauteur, his perpetual boredom, his often drunken licentiousness, in recognition of his worldliness—and his self-assurance as a budding cavalry commander. Three days on the road, with the prince starting like a terrified deer at the very thought that the French curassiers might be getting too close, had changed that. Henry de Coimbra was an empty windbag.

And when Richard thought of Henry's proprietorial air towards Anne de Carvalho . . . but such effrontery would end the moment they set foot in Rio. Richard would see to that.

"But light airs make for a pleasant voyage," Anthony Grant remarked. "Do you know, this is the first Atlantic crossing I have made without being seasick? Or do you suppose I should not have said that until we are safely at anchor in Guanabara?"

Younger of the Grant brothers, Anthony possessed the family coloring and height, but was so self-effacing as to remain almost unnoticed most of the time. He had willingly assumed the junior role in the firm, content to oversee the Lisbon end of the business while William stayed in Rio and retained his grasp upon the worldwide connections and interests of the company—although he of course remained under the watchful eye of his father, officially retired, but nonetheless still very much the head of the family. Anthony had actually married before his brother, at the age of eighteen—early for an American but customary in Brazil—only to lose his bride, Isabella, in childbirth. Thus his son, Charles, was actually older than Richard, although doomed—because of Grandpa Jack's belief in the law of primogeniture—to spend his life in a subordinate position.

This was not something that appeared to concern the family as a whole, but it bothered Richard—not that he had any intention of surrendering any part of his inheritance, but Charles always left him with a most uneasy feeling. Perhaps it was due to the tragic circumstances of his cousin's birth; more likely it was simply due to having been bullied by him when they had been children together. Charles's approaching presence was in fact the only cloud on the horizon of happiness that was his home. With his ebullient self-confidence, his perpetual air of enjoying some private joke that he shared with no one, Charles was the complete antithesis of his father. Yet Richard could

not help but wonder if Uncle Anthony, for all his kind serenity, was not aware of the rivalry between the two young men.

Further reflection was suddenly ended by the roll of a drum, sounding from the forward part of the ship, bringing officers hurrying into the waist of the vessel to stand beside the red-jacketed marines. Captain Cary ran a well-ordered ship, and no day passed without some unfortunate sailor being triced up on a grating for punishment.

"Poor devil," Anthony said. "I'm for going below. Richard?"

Richard hesitated and glanced at Prince Henry, who had turned away from the rail, eyes gleaming. Watching some miserable transgressor having the skin removed from his back was the only aspect of the voyage the prince found at all interesting. The same was true of his sister, Félicité, who would undoubtedly be on deck in a moment. And undoubtedly she would be accompanied by Anne de Carvalho.

"I'll stay, Uncle," he said quietly, and moved to the companion hatch to assist the ladies.

The princess came first, her blond curls bobbing as she hurried. Her delicate features and fair complexion were very like her brother's.

"We're not too late?" she asked, her voice shrill with excitement. "Oh, that maid is *too* slow. I should have *her* flogged. There would be sport! Do move out of my way, Richard." Warm as the day promised to be, Félicité de Coimbra wore a velvet gown. Rings sparkled on her fingers and diamond pendants dripped from her ears; she looked better outfitted for a ballroom than for the decks of a man-of-war. Now she pushed Richard aside as she hurried for a vantage point by the forward rail.

He dropped his hand and gave it to Anne de Carvalho instead. In contrast to the slight, pretty princess, Anne was tall and strongly built, with bold features and a figure to match, and a wealth of glorious curling black hair that now tumbled past her shoulders, no doubt because of haste. Her gown was of plain linen, and worn over a single petticoat. But for him, she was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen; each passing day only served to renew his admiration.

"Do you really wish to watch this?" he asked.

Her head turned, a faint frown gathering between the huge dark eyes. "Don't you?"

"Not particularly." Still holding her hand, he drew her to-

wards the taffrail at the very stern of the ship, deserted at this moment. "We'll be in Rio tomorrow. Perhaps by tonight."

"Tomorrow, Lieutenant Harvey says. He says there will be no wind today. Did you know they are going to have a ball this evening, as it will be our last at sea? Isn't that exciting?"

He was never sure whether she was joking or serious; she used her gentle humor as a weapon, usually defensively, but with devastating effect when angered. He knew so little about her, while seeming to know so much. They had both been born in Rio, and since her father and his were cousins, and she was only a year younger, they had played together as children. Then she had just been a somewhat incompetent ball of fluff, unable to compete at the masculine games, always led by Cousin Charlie, two years older than Anne.

But later she had been sent away to a convent in Lisbon, and from there had apparently been required to take up a position as a lady-in-waiting at court, both to complete her education and in the hope of securing a wealthy and powerful husband. In those years he had thought very little of her, and when, three years ago, he himself had made the voyage to the mother country, a shy and gauche young creole, he had been overwhelmed by the sophisticated and utterly beautiful creature to whom he had been introduced as cousin.

The very thought of her had been dazzling, just as the rumors that surrounded her and her friends—and most of all her closest friend, the Princess Félicité—had been confusing. University students are by nature coarse, and by nature envious of their betters, and by nature antagonistic to courts and royalty. And Queen Maria Francisca's court was certainly a place where there was a good deal of drinking and cardplaying and late-night entertainment. Therefore, in the overheated imaginations of the undergraduates of Sintra University, it must also be a place of midnight assignations, of fornication and adultery; any lady-in-waiting was assumed to be an aristocratic whore. He had fought his first duel over the reputation of Anne de Carvalho, and as he was a very accurate shot, Anne's reputation had remained inviolate, at least in his hearing, for the next three years.

Anne had remained entirely unaware of his feat of arms. But he had never doubted that she was worth defending, even if he sometimes wondered whether so much smoke did not indicate at least a small fire. Certainly it was impossible to doubt that Félicité was as morally loose as she was painted;

she never denied it, even claimed for herself all the vices of which she was accused, and wore her lusts with an aggressive disregard for femininity. At this moment, as she leaned over the rail, she was exposing her breasts to the assembled ship's company in her eagerness to watch the first blow of the cat-o'-nine-tails on the naked back below her.

The sound of the whip caused Anne an involuntary shudder, and she turned away to look astern at the bubbling wake, glistening in the rays of the rising sun. Her revulsion was enough to confirm to Richard that she had little in common with Félicité. It was Anne's slightly insecure social status as the daughter of a creole soldier that made it necessary for her to play the princess's companion. And he could hardly criticize Anne de Carvalho for being Félicité's closest friend, when he was Henry's—or had been Henry's, until last November.

And she would be Félicité's companion for only a little while longer.

"Yes," he said, "I'd heard about the ball. Will you dance with me?"

"If you ask me," she said.

"I am doing so now. Every dance."

"Richard!" she protested uneasily, a faint flush starting up in her cheeks. Of course she must be entirely aware of his feelings; he had made them plain often enough. And at the New Year's Eve ball, only a month ago, he had held her in his arms, and kissed her. No matter that several other men had probably kissed her that night—to *him* she had responded. Their tongues had touched, and their bodies had seemed to swell against each other. Next day he had been heartily ashamed of himself, but she had not avoided his company, had even sought it. That kiss, that experience of a mutual passion, however brief, had ended his last doubts as to his love for her.

But now she frowned at him. "Every dance? I do think you should give one or two to Filly."

"I really am not feeling that charitable."

"She is very fond of you, you know," Anne said, still staring out to sea.

"Filly? Can you really claim that she is fond of anyone but herself?"

"Well..." Anne smiled. "I suppose she is a little selfish. But that makes her very determined. And she is determined to be fond of you."

It was his turn to frown. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

"Of course not." She began to turn away, and he caught her hand again.

"I don't really care what Félicité is up to," he said. "Anne . . ." He drew a very long breath. But with Rio, and their immediate separation, only a day's sail away, he had to speak now. "Will you marry me?"

Her mouth sagged open in consternation, even as color flared into her face.

"I know I shouldn't have said that," he said hurriedly. "It's just that, it is something . . . well, I wanted you to know how I feel. I've already written Mama and Papa . . ."

"You've done *what*?" Her voice rose in alarm, and she hastily glanced around her.

"I haven't mentioned your name," he reassured her. "I just told them that I was in love, and wished to be married as soon as possible after my return." He squeezed her fingers. "I *am* in love with you, Anne. And you know it."

She licked her lips. "I know that you are fond of me."

"Don't ever use that word again," he said.

"Well . . ."

"And you like me, too, Anne. Say it. Please."

"Of course, I do. I . . . but Richard, you don't know anything *about* me."

"For heaven's sake, I've known you all my life."

"That's not necessarily *knowing* somebody."

"Then you don't know me, either. We'll find out about each other, together."

She stared at him. "Do you want that, Richard? Do you really want that?"

"More than anything else in the world. If you want it too."

"Oh, Richard . . ." The drumroll had stopped, and the wretched sailor was being taken down. "Do you think our parents *would* agree?"

"Our parents will be the happiest people in all the world," he promised. "I can hardly wait to tell them."

He spent the rest of the day in a happy daze. It had been so easy. And he had spent the entire voyage attempting to find the courage to approach her at all! If only he had done so earlier. But then, perhaps that would have been a mistake. He

would never have been able to restrain himself during the rest of the voyage. Whereas now, there was just one more night to be got through, and then they would be in Rio.

By evening the wind had dropped altogether, and the great ships merely drifted, rolling only slightly in the low swell, their sails occasionally flapping against their booms with a loud crack, their timbers gently creaking. On the quarterdeck of the *Bucentaure*, all was gaiety and light, with red-jacketed marine orderlies serving rum punch and wine, while the band did its best with the unfamiliar dance music. Officers and midshipmen in blue coats and white breeches danced attendance upon the ladies, while the ladies themselves were a glitter of bare shoulders and jeweled pendants and rings. Above them fairy lights hung from the rigging to either side, and the brilliant tropical moon shone down like the most genial candelabrum. The temperature was only slightly cooled by the night air, and helped to make the constant supply of liquid refreshment the more enjoyable, while to every side the lights of the other ships danced and twinkled, as if they were disporting themselves in the midst of a vast city.

Richard knew he should be the happiest man in the world. And he was, when he regarded Anne. Her crimson ball gown was one of the most daring present, and her magnificent breasts seemed to surge at him, snow-white promises for the future. But this evening her answering smile was strangely hesitant, and she seemed almost reluctant to find herself in his arms. "You did say you'd dance with Filly," she said.

"And I'm a man of my word. Once."

"The next dance," Anne said. "I know she's looking forward to it."

He frowned at her. "If you wish me to, my dearest girl." And a sudden light seemed to explode in his brain. "You haven't told her about us, have you?"

She flushed, but she met his gaze. "No," she said. "No, I haven't."

She was telling the truth. Of course, she was telling the truth. Anne de Carvalho would never lie.

"For a moment I thought she had tried to talk you out of it," he said. "I'm sure she would try. Would you *like* to be talked out of it?"

Her flush had faded, but once again she gave him a long, appraising stare. "Out of what, Richard? Nothing can be settled

until our parents have agreed. You know that. My mother and father are not Americans. They would be horrified to know we had even discussed the matter."

"Stop worrying. Uncle Ramon and I have always been the best of friends, and I know that Papa adores you. As for Mama, well . . . we merely have to convince her that we are old enough to know that we are in love. Your mother will be the same."

She bit her lip, and looked from left to right at the other dancing couples, as if afraid they might have overheard; she and Richard had at that moment been making their march through the double row of arched arms.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'll keep my voice down."

The music was stopping. "I do not think we should discuss it anymore," she said, "at least until after we have landed. Promise me."

He still held her hand. Now he squeezed the fingers. "Of course. If you will promise me that you still wish it to happen."

She gazed at him, and a trace of color returned to her cheeks. "I . . . I will be happy to marry you, Richard. If that is what our parents wish."

He frowned at her. This morning she had been so gloriously excited at the prospect. Or had he only imagined it? "Anne . . ."

"The music is starting again," she said. "You promised to dance with Filly." She half pushed him away.

He would never understand women. But perhaps she felt that she had been *too* enthusiastic this morning, even immodestly so. It would all be different once they got ashore, and that would be tomorrow. He crossed the deck toward the princess, who pretended not to see him coming, preferring to chat animatedly with the officer beside her; like most of the Portuguese aristocracy, she spoke perfect English. He supposed she was really looking very lovely tonight, in a pale blue taffeta gown with no less plunging a décolletage than Anne's, although Félicité had far less to display.

"Why, Richard," she said at last, as he stood at her shoulder. "I thought you had forgotten my existence."

"I was but performing my duty dances first," he said, wondering if she would notice the sarcasm.

She didn't. Her eyebrows arched. "How sweet of you to say that. You'll excuse us, Lieutenant Miller?"

The Englishman bowed, and withdrew.

"I do not really wish to dance," Félicité said, reverting to

Portuguese. "I would rather walk in the moonlight."

"Why not? Shall we go forward?"

She glanced at him. "It might be a mistake."

"You mean the common seamen resent your watching them being flogged?"

Once again she ignored his sarcasm. "I think they enjoy it too much. Let's go to the gallery." She took his hand and led him toward the companionway.

"Félicité . . ."

"Oh, don't be silly. We have the freedom of the ship." She half pulled him down the ladder to the next deck, where he immediately had to duck his head. He followed her through the wardroom and then on to the stern gallery. "I want to talk with you, anyway."

He looked left and right. They were completely alone, the rake of the poop hanging out over their heads. It was impossible to see even the mizzenmast from here, although every so often the boom slatted across above them. Below them was the softly heaving sea. This privacy was so deliberate that he knew she must have noticed something, whether Anne had let anything slip or not: he was about to receive a lecture. As if he cared. "Well?"

"How old are you, Richard?"

"I shall be twenty-two next March."

"Oh!" She looked disappointed. Then she smiled. "But it's not really important, is it? I'm just twenty-three. So there's not much difference. And you're so big, and strong . . . the thought of you inside me makes me want to scream with joy. Does it make you want to scream too, Richard?"

He stared at her in astonishment. His sexual experiences with women had been confined to an occasional visit to a prostitute during one of Prince Henry's nights out in Lisbon. He had never taken part in any of the wild games reputed to be played at court, had never really thought that girls like Félicité de Coimbra—beautifully groomed and beautifully dressed, beautifully perfumed and with unblemished complexions, entrancingly elegant and inexpressibly vulgar—were approachable. He could not believe she was talking to him this way.

"It does," Félicité said. "I know it does. I can feel it does." She had put both arms round his waist to bring him against her, without his even realizing it in his stupefaction. "I could

never marry a man I didn't want desperately."

He tried to push her away. "I have no idea what you are talking about!"

"Why, our marriage," she said.

"Our . . . ?"

"I've discussed it with Mama, and she thinks it is a splendid idea. Well, at first she didn't, of course. She was all upset about us having to leave Portugal. And she had her heart set on that old marquis de Foa as my husband. Can you imagine it? Seventy-~~£~~f he's a day! But of course that's all finished now. His wealth was in land, and the French have taken all that. But you—is it true that your grandfather is the richest man in all the empire?"

Richard was only slowly gaining control of his thoughts. "Would you mind saying that again? You have been discussing marrying me, with your mother?"

He had not even seen the dowager princess of Coimbra since the day they set sail. She had taken to her bed on the first day of the voyage, and had remained there ever since.

"Well, I had to, once I had made up my own mind. And Mama has promised to approach your parents, as soon as it can decently be arranged. She wasn't all that difficult to persuade. I mean, I know you aren't actually nobility. And you are an *American*, a Yankee. But you do have *some* royal blood. And then, well, money is so important in this day and age. And I do so like you, Richard. I know you're going to make me very happy."

Her utter arrogance seemed irrelevant, as understanding began to dawn.

"You've told Anne about this?"

"Anne? Why, of course I have. She's my friend. I tell her everything." She frowned. "She hasn't mentioned it to you, has she? The wretch. She promised . . ."

He held her shoulders. "When did you tell her? When?"

"Why . . . Richard, you are hurting me."

He squeezed tighter, his fingers eating into the white flesh. "When?"

"We only discussed it today," she gasped. "I only made up my mind yesterday, knowing that the voyage was about to end. Richard . . . please."

There were tears in her eyes. Slowly he released his grip, and she rubbed the reddened flesh.

"I ought to break your neck," he said. Poor, dear Anne. How confused and miserable she must be, from fear of offending Félicité, of going against court etiquette—and, he hoped, of losing him.

Félicité's eyebrows arched. "For wishing to marry you?"

"For upsetting Anne."

"Anne? What has Anne got to do with it?"

"Simply that it is Anne I intend to marry."

She stared at him, then gave a peal of laughter. "Anne? You wish to marry Anne?"

"I'm so glad you find it amusing," Richard said grimly, resisting a strong urge to slap her face.

"Amusing? It is the most absurd thing I have ever heard. Anyway, it's not possible. She's going to marry Henry."

"To do *what*?"

"That, at least, is all arranged," Félicité declared. "It was arranged before we even left Portugal. Mama has already corresponded with Senora de Carvalho, and she is delighted at the idea."

"But . . . does Anne know this?"

Félicité giggled. "Well, I should think not. It's her parents' business to tell her what arrangements they have made for her. I was asked to keep it all a secret, and I have. And Henry certainly won't have mentioned it. He isn't really very romantic. He's only interested in what lies between a girl's legs. But it will all be sorted out when we reach Rio."

"Yes," he said. "You can be quite sure that it will all be sorted out." Anne, sweet, beautiful Anne, married to that lascivious lout? The very thought made him want to hit somebody, anybody. And she remained quite ignorant of the fate that was hanging over her.

"And you must not tell her," Félicité said. "That would be quite improper. As for marrying her yourself—why, really, that is ridiculous! She's your cousin."

"So are you."

"Very distantly. Anyway, as I say, she's betrothed to Henry, whether she knows it or not. So it looks as if you're stuck with me. And I'm so happy about that, Richard . . ." Her arms were back round his waist, holding him against her. "We're going to be so happy, Richard, because we can *feel*. I must *feel*. Sensation! That's all there is to life. Sensation! Listen, when we're married, I'll let you flog me, if you like. I'm not afraid

to suffer. I want to suffer. I want to *feel*. Can you understand that?"

"I can understand that desires like that must be kept under control," he said, attempting to pull himself free, and to keep his temper.

"But Richard . . ." She hugged him even closer. "Make love to me. Now. Not here. Inside. Come to our cabin. Anne won't come down while the ball is on. Now, Richard, now. I never felt more like it in my life."

He gazed down into her upturned face, her parted lips, her little white teeth, her darting pink tongue. He could not believe his ears. She was a princess. Far removed from the direct line of succession, perhaps, but nonetheless a member of the royal house. With the mind of the lowest guttersnipe.

Above their heads the mizzen boom slammed hard over, and the *Bucentaure* immediately heeled, while the breeze cooled the sweat on their faces.

"A wind," came the call from above. "A wind. Make sail."

"Oh, damnation," Félicité said.

Richard removed her arms from his waist. "You've lost nothing, Félicité. I wouldn't go to bed with you if you were the last woman left alive on earth."

Chapter 3

Guns boomed, church bells rang out, and since it was nearly dusk of the following day by the time the royal party finally abandoned their vessel for the shore, fireworks carved their way through the evening sky. The immense bulk of the Sugar-loaf was illuminated with multicolored lanterns, and every ship moored in the huge lagoon of Guanabara Bay was filled with cheering spectators. The people of Rio de Janeiro had done the best with the very limited time at their disposal to make their city ready to receive their queen and her family. Now they swarmed around the British flagship in their small boats, or thronged the landing stage, pressing against the blue-coated soldiers trying to restrain them, to catch a first glimpse of these legendary beings.

Thus they gaped at their queen, Maria Francisca, now seventy-four years of age, walking with a stick and with the aid of two of her gentlemen, still wearing black although she had been a widow for twenty-two years, nodding and smiling as she had been told to do, but occasionally grimacing and spitting, and muttering to herself as her concentration wandered. She had suffered, for those twenty-two years since the death of her beloved husband and consort Pedro, from the mind-numbing affliction that had turned her father into a recluse and which, it was said, had also afflicted her royal cousin, George III of England.

Behind her walked her son, Prince John, at forty at the height of his strength and dignity, glancing from left to right with a regal frown, as well he might, for he had ruled the Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves as regent for his demented mother ever since the death of his strong-willed grandmother in 1792; and if *he* felt any guilt at having deserted his countrymen in their fight against Bonaparte, he did not show it. People might well be wondering how stable *his* mind was, since so many of his ancestors had suffered from the curse of the House of Braganza, but he had clearly taken after his Spanish grandmother. Others might be wondering how a prince with such a reputation for autocracy and determined opposition to anything in the nature of liberalism or radicalism would get on in the bosom of his colonial and thus less conservative subjects. And if they might hope that Prince John would mellow with acquaintance, they could hardly make the same mistake about his wife. Carlota Joaquina of Spain walked immediately behind her husband, as was her place, and between her two sons, and she scarcely deigned to notice the crowds at all.

Perhaps, the onlookers thought, she was still confused by the tumultuous events of the past three months. She was sister to the new Spanish king—to whom, indeed, her eldest daughter was married, for such were the incestuous entanglements of the European royal families—yet her brother had sanctioned the use of his country by his French masters as a springboard for the invasion of her adopted country, Portugal. Others, more knowledgeable, might whisper that she was the most unfortunate of women, whose proud temper and chaste habits had led to her public renunciation by her husband, and who had not shared his bed in years.

Yet she *had* shared his bed on occasion in the past, that much was obvious. Pedro de Alcántara, her elder son, walking at her right hand, was ten years old; Miguel was but six. No one watching could doubt, in the carriage of the little princes, in the brilliance of their uniforms, in the studied arrogance of their glances, that they knew their places, knew that the one was certain to inherit this wide-flung empire, and the other to stand at his shoulder.

Yet for the moment the sight of all the surviving members of the House of Braganza—together with all their aunts and uncles and cousins and nephews and nieces, as well as the venerable members of the government and officials of state,

the armed attendants bearing the regalia, the crown jewels, and all the wealth of the treasury, the hordes of gentlemen and ladies in waiting, the horses of the royal stables, and even the state coach, rumbling out of the interior of a warship—had sent Rio into a frenzy of patriotic and royalist joy. Not a single member of the royal family could doubt that in abandoning Portugal for this remote chunk of South America they had acted for once wisely.

"Long live Queen Maria!" the crowds roared.

"Long live Prince John!"

"Long live Princess Carlota!"

"Long live Prince Pedro!"

"Long live Prince Miguel!"

"Long live them all," William Grant remarked dryly, at last releasing Richard and allowing him to embrace his mother.

"One would suppose you doubted that this is a great day for Brazil, William," Anthony remarked.

"Oh, a great day, certainly," his brother agreed. "But greatness can be expensive to maintain."

Richard had forgotten how pessimistic his father was by nature. Although Grandfather Jack had placed him, as the eldest son, in overall control of the entire Grant Company, he still regarded life with cautious uncertainty, and while he was obviously delighted that his son should have come home safely, he regarded such a gift from providence as nothing more than a loan, or a lure to snare him into a mood of overconfidence.

Richard assumed that a good deal of his own innate caution was inherited from this source, but he reflected that it was surely at least tempered by the confidence of his mother, who now kissed him for a fourth time before giving him a final hug. She had not seen her son for three years, and regarded him almost as a stranger.

"Home the prodigal," remarked Charles Grant, smiling at him.

Charles, Richard remembered, was always smiling. He had even smiled when, as a boy, he had twisted the smaller Richard's arms behind him during their games, or pretended to teach him to wrestle as an excuse for beating him up.

Except for an inch or two of height and of breadth of shoulder—now in Richard's favor—the men were remarkably alike. Each possessed the straight black hair and the wide-set gray eyes of the Grants. Each was dressed in the height of fashion,

from leather boots to buckskin breeches to gleaming cravats and light-gray beavers, as befitted the two wealthiest young men in Brazil. They could have been brothers.

"It's good to be home," Richard acknowledged, and squeezed his cousin's proffered hand.

"Home," William Grant said. "Copacabana! We'll all go out there tomorrow. Father and Mother are waiting to see you. They wouldn't come down, you understand. Too much noise and bustle, Father said."

"Of course," Richard agreed. "But . . ." He was looking left and right, desperately trying to catch a glimpse of Anne, and at last making out the Carvalho family coach, standing amid the mass of other equipages some fifty yards away.

He had not had a chance to speak with her since the previous night—with the wind freshening almost to a gale, she had retired to bed before he could find her again. Today he had seen her but once in the bustle of disembarking, and when he had smiled at her she had looked almost frightened. God alone knew what Félicité would have told her. But certainly she had to be reassured as soon as possible that there was no danger that he would fall for the princess's blandishments.

"Excuse me for one moment, Papa." Richard pushed his way through the still teeming throng, acknowledging an occasional greeting, reached the coach as Anne was about to enter, and bit his lip in anger as he discovered that Henry de Coimbra was also here, kissing her hand.

"A safe journey, then," Richard said.

She turned on the step and flushed. "And to you, Richard. You remember my brother, Duarte? Duarte, this is Richard Grant."

The young man was as tall as his sister, but remarkably thin, with the bright pink cheeks of a consumptive. He was, Richard recalled, just eighteen, and had no doubt been on the point of departing for Lisbon and his further education when Napoleon's ambitions had put an end to his plans and most other people's. Now he smiled and gave Richard a firm handshake. "It is my pleasure, Richard," he said.

"Richard Grant!" Ramon de Carvalho leaned from the window of the coach to seize Richard's hand. Like his father before him, he was a soldier, second in command of the Rio garrison, but this night he was abandoning his duties, which should have included dancing attendance upon the royal party, to greet his daughter. "How good it is to see you home."

"I will call," Richard said. "If I may." He looked past Anne at her mother, Barbara de Carvalho, who gave him a chilly smile from the interior of the coach.

"Of course you may, Richard," Anne said. Her voice was as steady as her gaze. He looked into her eyes and attempted silently to express his love, and was rewarded with a faint flush of understanding. "You will always be welcome at our house."

"As soon as . . . well, I have been home," he said. "Perhaps tomorrow."

Suddenly her eyes were filled with happy tears. "I shall be waiting." She looked past him to force a smile at Charles Grant. "Why, Charles," she said. "You have not changed at all."

"But you have, Cousin Anne," Charles Grant said, raising her knuckles to his lips. "The lovely cygnet has become a beautiful swan. Senora." He removed his hat to Barbara de Carvalho.

"Charles," Anne said, taking refuge in humor. "You have been practicing." She got into the coach, her brother stepped in after her, and Richard closed the door, feeling distinctly out of sorts.

"Make way there," shouted the driver, cracking his whip. "Make way."

"You must tell me when you are visiting the Carvalhos, Richard," Prince Henry said. "I will accompany you. Now I must return to my mother. Senors." He pushed into the crowd.

"Rivals?" Charles inquired.

Richard led the way back to his father's coach. "Of course not. Prince Henry is my friend, and his sister is Anne's. Thus we see a great deal of each other."

"I'll wager you do," Charles remarked. "I have heard it said that that pair are so free with their favors that whoever does eventually put a ring on their fingers will have an easy passage."

Richard turned to face him.

Charles smiled at him. "So now, tell me, is she as good as rumor has it?"

All the frustrated anger and apprehension that had been bubbling in his mind for twenty-four hours suddenly seemed to explode. "This is my first night back in Brazil," he said, speaking quietly and evenly. "So I'll not take offense. But so help me God, Charles Grant, if you mention Anne's name in that fashion again, I'll kill you."

Charles Grant smiled.

"Such a nice boy," Barbara de Carvalho remarked, as the carriage rolled into the night.

"Oh, I'm so glad you think so, Mama," Anne said. "He is nice. And I know he's going to do well. He was telling me, on the voyage, some of the plans he has for the company."

Her mother regarded her from beneath arched eyebrows. "I was speaking of the prince."

"The prince? Oh..."

"He is very fond of you," Ramon de Carvalho observed.

"Well, of course he is, Papa. We're friends."

"I think the subject could be broached now, Ramon," Barbara de Carvalho said.

"Subject?" Anne looked from one to the other.

"Ah..." Ramon de Carvalho cleared his throat; he had always been slightly afraid of this splendid young woman who was his daughter. "I have received a communication from the dowager princess of Coimbra, suggesting that she would be very pleased if we were to arrange a match between her son and our daughter." He began to speak very quickly; he was well aware of the reputation both of Prince Henry and of Queen Maria's court, and could only excuse this match by reflecting that Anne too had been brought up there, and that any man of wealth and position to whom she might be married would also have been brought up there. "Her letter arrived some months ago, and I immediately wrote you to acquaint you with our decision, but of course my letter must have crossed with your journey out here. None of us had the slightest idea this catastrophe was going to happen. But now that you are both here..."

"Your *decision*?" Anne cried.

"We are overjoyed," Barbara de Carvalho said.

"Yes indeed," Ramon said less certainly. "The fact is, my dear girl, you must not forget that you will soon be twenty-one. That is an absurd age for a young lady not to be married, and especially in this climate. The medical profession tells us that the best age for childbirth is between fifteen and twenty, and in *this* climate, between fifteen and eighteen. Why..."

"I was married at fifteen," Barbara observed, "and had four miscarriages. I was nineteen before I bore you. And twenty-one before dear Duarte arrived." She squeezed her son's hand. "He nearly died."

"Yes," Anne said. "But..."

"Prince Henry is a superb match for you," Ramon said.

"Well, I know his father was illegitimate, but that does not matter in royal circles. His grandfather was king of Portugal. And you have virtually grown up together, and are such friends . . ."

And that, Anne thought regretfully, is exactly the problem. They *had* virtually grown up together, had indulged in all the silly games in which Félicité was the ringleader, had fumbled after each other at blindman's buff, and as they had grown older, had even bundled together—shared a bed with half a dozen others, with their lower limbs encased in pillowcases so that, whatever mood took them, there was no risk to anyone's virginity. They had got drunk together and tormented servants together and behaved in every possible way like typical members of the aristocracy. If she had pretended to enjoy it all—for the one crime at court was to be unpopular—she had always secretly despised herself, and them, for their frivolity and their often vicious license. Richard Grant had promised such a glorious change from all that.

For a single, tumultuous moment, she was tempted to defy her parents, to tell them of Richard's proposal, of the happiness that he had promised her. Of the love? There was a word she was afraid to consider. As a Portuguese lady she had been brought up to accept that it was extremely unlikely that she would ever *love* her husband. Honor, respect, obey—those were the words that mattered. As if anyone could possibly honor or respect Prince Henry of Coimbra! But Richard Grant . . . there was a man to be loved.

She sighed. She *was* a Portuguese lady, and it was her duty to accept the man her parents selected for her. Richard Grant had been only a dream. However much he might assume he had control of his own destiny, he was caught up in the web of parental control as much as she was. He was destined for Félicité.

Seeing it the next day, Richard realized he had forgotten the sweep of the Grant estate, the magnificence of the beach, and the immensity of the ocean—even after spending fifty-eight days upon that restless element. Suddenly he felt a stranger.

He supposed that three years was a long time in the life of one who musters less than twenty-two altogether. Everything seemed so unfamiliar: the warmth of the evening; the caress of the breeze, so different from the harsh blasts of Portugal in

November; the slither of the cicadas and the belching of the bullfrogs; the way in which the moment the coach stopped it was entirely surrounded by black slaves dressed in the Grant livery of green and red and blue—a melding of the colors of Portugal and Scotland. They seemed a happy, unaffected people, these slaves, as they welcomed him exuberantly. But he knew that not all the slaves in Brazil, and there were a great number, were well treated.

Perhaps he had spent too much time on the voyage in lonely brooding. The fact was that his life had suddenly changed to an extent that was both unsettling and exhilarating. He had looked forward to another year at Sintra, and then, presuming that the war, if not over, would continue not to interfere with the education of a Portuguese gentleman, to two or three years of a grand tour. Then, perhaps, would come marriage. Finally the requirements of his birth and heritage would have brought him back to a lifetime of prosaic business, of directing ships and cargoes, of inspecting crops and mines—and of owning slaves. Napoleon's conquest of Portugal had hastened that inevitable process.

It had, of course, also brought him closer to Anne de Carvalho, and to a future of unblemished happiness. And yet . . . how grand, he thought, as he was ushered by his mother to the steps leading up to the front verandah, where the rest of the family were gathered, how splendid if I could have been born in Grandfather Jack's time, and had the British to fight, and the Indians, had been able to enjoy all the exciting uncertainty of creating an empire, instead of merely inheriting one; and Anne would have been at my side, just as Grandmother Kita had fought beside Grandfather.

Despite his white hair, Jack Grant stood with hardly a stoop, and his grasp, as he took Richard's hand, was as firm as it must have been on that great day when, as a captain in the infant United States Navy, he had captured three British ships between noon and sundown.

"You've grown," he said briefly. "We'll have a talk. When the ladies are finished with you."

"It will be my pleasure, sir," Richard said, and found himself in Grandmother Kita's arms. To him she had always been a legend, a woman to dream about, even if she was his grandmother. But when he had last known her he was a boy. Now that he was a man, he wondered what estimation he would form of her. And wondered whether he would ever learn the

truth behind any of the rumors about her.

But it was more important to consider what opinion she might form of him. She smiled, and kissed him on both cheeks and then on the mouth. "God has brought you home safe to us, Richard," she said, "as I knew He would. Now we can face whatever the future holds, a united family."

She did not release his hand, even as she allowed him to greet his aunt. Inez Grant Cutter was forty-two, two years younger than William Grant, two years older than Anthony. Her hair was still deep auburn, and she retained all the beauty of her mother, Christina. At seventeen she had accompanied her father, Jack, on that never-to-be-forgotten expedition up the Amazon, and it had been the high point of her life. During it she had flowered as an artist, developing the skill that had encouraged her father to send her to Europe to study—even as a young bride—and which had made her internationally famous, her canvases hanging in London and Paris. And on that expedition she had fallen in love. Hal Cutter stood at her side now, as always a faithful supporter of Grant fortunes and of Grandfather Jack in particular. His left sleeve was empty—the arm had been shot away, at Jack Grant's side, during that famous three-ship victory off the Chesapeake—but this had in no way hampered his prowess either as a man or a shipmaster, nor caused him to question for a moment his adherence to his friend, employer, and father-in-law.

"United again," Christina repeated, reclaiming Richard's hand as she led him indoors to present him to the Portuguese servants, the butlers and housekeepers and estate overseers, and to Father Fernando, her confessor. "You must not roam again, Richard. Your grandfather was always roaming. You must stay here with us. There is much for you to do."

"Sad," Jack Grant said. "Very sad. I do not suppose Portugal has ever been less prepared for a war." He smiled grimly. "But then, when has Portugal ever been prepared for a war?"

He sat behind his huge desk in the large office overlooking the beach and the ocean beyond. Around him his sons and grandsons were gathered, William and Anthony seated to either side, Richard seated before the desk, Charles standing behind, smoking an after-dinner cheroot.

"But at least you were spared," Jack went on. "And for that we must be grateful. Nor must we waste our time in looking over our shoulder. We Grants have never done that. Portugal

is lost, at least for the foreseeable future. All of Europe is lost, for a considerable time. We must seek our markets elsewhere."

"There is nowhere else," Charles remarked.

"I don't agree with you," his grandfather said. "I think there is a vast market to be found in North America. Not, perhaps, for our sugar; they grow their own. But for our coffee. They do not grow that in the United States." He smiled again. "There is also scope for our shipping lines. We will shift our trade routes from Lisbon to Charleston and Boston, New York and Montreal. But we will need a reliable agent, on the spot, to control events." He looked over the four men.

"I should be happy—" Anthony began.

Jack shook his head. "You have been away too long as it is, Anthony," he said. "I know your mother would wish to have you here, in our declining years."

"Well, sir," Richard said. "If you would permit me—"

Another shake of the head. "You are the heir. Perhaps events have rushed on you somewhat quicker than any of us might have expected, Richard, but since they have, you will remain here and learn everything there is to know about the business. You are the future, Richard. Nothing must interfere with that." His gaze swung toward Charles. "That leaves you."

Charles jerked the cheroot from his lips. "Me?"

"You'll go to the Boston office," his grandfather said. "That'll make a good headquarters. And we've friends in Boston."

"I would have thought," Charles said, "if you'll forgive me, sir, that as Richard is going to be the head of the company in due course, it would be best for *him* to get out and see the various offices and enterprises." He gave a nervous cough. "While there is yet time."

Jack chuckled. "There'll be time. But for the moment, Richard will have enough to do here. I want to see you married, boy, by Christmas."

"Married?" Richard cried, his heart pounding with excited delight.

"Aye. You'll be twenty-two in a month or two. A man should marry young, and have his children young, so he's about when they're men, eh?" He glanced left and right, at his two sons. "Now, this girl they've chosen for you, she may be a princess, but she's not ideal, in my opinion. Too old, by far. But as she's been chosen, then the sooner the matter is settled and the marriage consummated, the better. You agree?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Richard said, looking at his father,

while the excitement suddenly lurched back into a stomach-churning mixture of anger and apprehension. "I did not know any matter was decided about my marriage. Nothing has been said to me."

"Well, there has hardly been time, Richard," William said. "But I do assure you, your mother and I have discussed the business, in the light of your letter, and your profession of love, and I am prepared to approach the dowager princess de Coimbra on your behalf. I am sure she will be every bit as pleased with the suggestion as are we. I know the Princess Félicité is no longer a girl, but I am told she is in the best of health—and, well, royal blood . . ."

"I do not love *her*, sir," Richard cried. "You have entirely misread my letter."

"Love?" Jack Grant demanded. "What has that got to do with it?"

Richard sucked air into his lungs. "Did you not marry for love, Grandfather?"

Jack stared at him for a moment, and then smiled. "Why, so I did. But I had someone to love."

"So do I, sir."

"Indeed? You'd best tell us her name."

"I should like to marry Anne de Carvalho, Grandfather. If she'll have me."

There was a silence of several seconds. Then Charles gave a brief laugh. "So that's what was in the wind last night."

"This is quite absurd," William said. "I happen to know that Anne de Carvalho is betrothed to Prince Henry."

"That is not so, Father," Richard said. "It has been suggested. Just as you have suggested that I should marry Félicité. Nothing has yet reached the betrothal stage."

"She is quite unsuitable," William declared.

"May I ask why, Father?"

"Well, brought up at court . . ."

"Was not the Princess Félicité brought up at court?"

"Do you seek to defy my wishes?" William demanded.

"I am sure Richard has no intention of doing that, William," Jack Grant said soothingly. "The matter has perhaps been sprung on him too quickly. Give it the most careful consideration, Richard."

Richard stood up. "I shall marry Anne, sir. Or I shall marry no one."

He braced himself for an explosion, but Jack Grant merely

regarded him for some seconds. Then he said, "I only asked you to consider the matter, Richard. Humor an old man to that extent."

Richard met his gaze, then glanced at his father, anxiously waiting.

"I will consider the matter, as you wish, Grandfather," he said, and left the room.

"Stop a moment, Richard," Christina Grant said.

He had been hurrying along the gallery to reach the stairs, and then his horse. But he checked at the sound of his grandmother's voice and looked through the open door into her boudoir, filled with morning sunlight; her apartment was next to her husband's office, and she reclined on a chaise longue, wrapped in a pale blue dressing gown, her hair in a loose cloud to her shoulders. She was alone.

"Come in," she said. "And close the door."

Richard hesitated, and then obeyed.

"How handsome you are," she said. "How like your grandfather in every way. Have you bathed this morning?"

"Pardon?"

"You must bathe every day," she said. "How often did you bathe in Portugal?"

"Why . . ." For the life of him he could not understand this conversation. "Once a week, like everyone else."

"That is very bad," she said. "I suppose you have been told that too much bathing weakens the constitution."

"Well, Grandmother—"

"That is utterly false," she said. "The Indians bathe every day, at least once. Sometimes twice and three times. And left to themselves, they are the healthiest people on earth. I would have you live like an Indian, Richard."

He shifted from foot to foot, somewhat uneasily. Perhaps she was half-mad after all.

"I have written a book containing my observations of them," Christina went on. "Your grandfather had a private edition printed for me. There is a copy on that shelf. I would like you to study it, and do as it says. I would have you remain always strong and healthy, Richard. You can be sure of that only by practicing Indian hygiene. Promise me that you will."

Richard went to the shelf and picked up the book. "I shall read your book, certainly, Grandmother. It will be a pleasure."

"And will you do as it says?"

"Well . . . if it means that much to you, Grandmother."

"Good boy." She patted the couch beside her. "Now come and tell me about Anne."

He frowned at her, and she gave a little laugh.

"I listened to your talk last night. I listen to everything that is spoken in my Jack's office. There is a tube through the wall. Oh, do not fear, he knows of it. He would not have it any other way."

Cautiously Richard sat down beside her ankles. "I love her," he said.

"And is she worthy of your love? Is she as strong as she is beautiful?"

"I had rather ask if I am worthy of her, Grandmother," he pointed out. "But she is certainly very handsome."

"And that is why you love her? For her handsomeness? For her straight limbs and large breasts?"

"Grandma!" He found himself flushing.

"That is no reason for marriage, Richard," she said. "Such attributes are more readily available in a mistress."

"I love her," he said stubbornly. "I am sure of it. I have thought of nothing else for the past two months. I have always loved her, I think, ever since we were children together. I do not care what they say of her."

"What *do* they say of her, Richard?"

He bit his lip. "What they say of everyone at court."

"Then it is probably all true, unless courts have changed since my day."

"I do not care if what they say is true. I do not care if—"

"She has already been bedded? Has already yielded all that you so wish to possess?"

He stared at her.

"It is something to think about," Christina said. "Something to be very sure about, Richard."

"I will marry her," he said. "If she will have me. It is her future I am interested in, not her past."

"Then come and give your grandmother a kiss," she said. "I too was not a virgin when I married your grandfather. But he also thought of the future, and not the past. For that we must all be grateful." She kissed him on the cheek. "When you bring your Anne to face the family, I will be at your side. Now go and make your proposal."

* * *

He supposed he should be the happiest man on earth. With Grandmother Kita supporting him, he could hardly fail. It was only necessary to obtain the definite consent of Anne herself, and surely her fears would be overcome by the knowledge that Christina Grant had given her blessing to their union. Grandmother Kita was actually no more than a cousin of the Carvalhos, but was held in equal respect by them as by her immediate family.

Then why was he not singing as he rode along? Perhaps he was too interested in what he was seeing—Brazil, after three years away. He took the road through Rio itself, the better to remind himself of the sights and sounds he could just recall: the dusty, unpaved streets, stinking of sewage and dead animals left to rot in the gutters; the weatherbeaten wooden buildings, termite-eaten and unstable, just as those made of stone were rain-pitted and crumbling; the Indians, liquor-and-disease-ridden remnants of a once proud nation; the blacks, hurrying about their masters' business; the mulattos—descendants of blacks and whites—and the mestizos—those of white and Indian parentage—who mostly worked as clerks or served in the army, but who sometimes owned their own shops, even their own plantations; the babble of Portuguese spoken in a variety of dialects; the whole overlaid and made tawdrily beautiful by the huge shade trees, the poincianas and the oleanders, with their magnificent pink and red blossoms, the gentle softness of their green leaves.

Then he was out of town again and walking his horse toward the Carvalho plantation, several miles inland, and perhaps even larger than the Grant estate. He rode between endless fields of tall, drooping sugar cane, and as the morning was well advanced, was grateful for the straw hat he had prudently decided to wear instead of his beaver. He could feel perspiration rolling down his back. He had not, of course, bathed. Grandmother Kita's theory was absurd, and possibly dangerous, according to all the medical opinion he had ever heard. Yet he had given her his word. Well, he thought, he would have his bath when he returned to Copacabana this evening. No doubt he would feel like it by then. By then, a great many things might be resolved, not least the turmoil in his own mind.

On board ship, he had for the first time been aware of an overwhelming desire. But it had not been purely sexual desire, even then. Rather, it had been a desire to share his life with

someone as beautiful and refined as Anne. To copy Grandfather Jack and Grandmother Kita, with as much success, perhaps.

But had Jack Grant ever doubted his Christina, even for a moment? Doubted his ability to be her husband? Doubted her willingness to be his wife? It was not possible to suppose him ever doubting anything.

Unlike his grandson. It was not that he was influenced by rumors; he was certain of this. He did not believe that Anne would have yielded her virginity before her marriage, although it was quite likely that she might have permitted liberties unimaginable in staid old Rio—undoubtedly under the influence of Félicité. But this mattered to him not at all. Nor did he believe she was past childbearing. He had always attributed the Brazilian custom of having women marry as soon as they reached puberty to sheer impatient lust on the part of their prospective husbands; white women were scarce in the colony. But like her possible immorality, her age was certainly a factor in his sudden uncertainty. He would be taking no girl to wife, but a woman, more sophisticated than himself.

Suddenly his confidence was gone. Yet he was here, riding through the high front gate and up the curving driveway to the Carvalho mansion, and clenching his jaw in angry frustration as he discovered a coach waiting at the steps, with the royal crest emblazoned on its doors. He looked beyond, at the row of triangles, from six of which there hung the naked body of a man, each back a mess of festering sores left by the cartwhip. Was it possible for any young woman brought up amid such daily scenes to avoid excess? And then he remembered that he also had been brought up amid such scenes, and had never failed to hate them.

Dogs barked, and slaves hurried forward to hold his bridle and keep his horse from rearing. Others appeared on the porch to relieve him of his hat and stick and offer him a glass of wine.

"Captain de Carvalho has gone into town, Your Excellency, to pay his respects to Her Majesty," the major domo explained. "Senora de Carvalho has accompanied him."

Richard gave a sigh of relief. "Then I have made my journey in vain," he said. "But, having come this far...perhaps Senorita de Carvalho will receive me? Or Senor Pedro?"

"They are both at home, Your Excellency, but the Senorita is entertaining."

"The Princess Félicité," Richard said, glancing at the coach,

"an old friend. Would you be good enough to announce me?"

"Of course, Your Excellency." The major domo hurried away, and Richard sat down with his iced wine. He supposed he should have guessed Félicité would be here, although surely she had other things to do, what with settling into a new home. Perhaps she would not be staying long. In any event, it should be possible for Anne to allow him a private interview, if he requested one—even if it would most certainly offend Félicité.

"Richard!" Anne herself came to greet him. She wore a house gown, in pale red, a shade of her favorite color. It was the first time he had ever seen her actually in dishabille. She looked cool and clean, her hair carefully brushed but unconfined, her whole being a glow of radiant womanhood. But her expression was infinitely sad.

He kissed her knuckles. "I am intruding."

"On Filly? That could never be." She took his hand to lead him toward the double doors into the main salon, where the major domo was waiting in a deep bow. Obviously, her haste suggested, she was afraid to be alone with him.

"Anne..." His heart pounded. "The fact is... oh, damnation."

The princess had appeared in the doorway. In strong contrast to her friend she was, as usual, dressed as if for a levee, with her pale blond hair swept up in an elaborate chignon, heavy diamond earrings drooping from her ears, a plunging décolletage, a huge reticule, and a strong aroma of perfume. "Richard," she said. "You are a naughty fellow, running off like that the other night. I looked everywhere for you!"

He reached for her hand, was instead seized and hugged against her. So she had decided to forgive him for his rudeness on the ship. Her lips sought his, and when he avoided that, she kissed his cheek instead. "And we have some unfinished business to discuss," she whispered. "Wretched boy."

He managed to disengage himself and glanced apologetically at Anne, who was watching them with a sad smile.

"But I am glad to have found you at last," Félicité continued, linking her arm through his as she escorted him into the enormous room from which French windows opened onto an expanse of flower-bordered lawn. "You will be pleased to know that Mama has had a letter from your dear mother expressing a desire to call. Obviously it is to discuss us. So we may regard the matter as entirely resolved. And I thought, since Anne is going to marry Henry..."

"Never!" Richard declared.

Anne flushed. "Well, the matter has not actually been settled yet."

"Nor will it be," Richard announced, freeing himself with an effort. Suddenly all the uncertainty that had been plaguing him throughout the day seemed to come together in a real anger at the effrontery of all of these people, and especially the little bitch before him, who seemed to think they could take over his life as they chose. If he was not going to behave like a gentleman, at least he was finally going to behave like a Grant.

"No?" Félicité inquired, her mouth closing like a steel trap.

"No," Richard said, feeling his resolution already beginning to fade. He squared his shoulders. "I came out here today to seek a meeting with you, Anne, and then with your parents. To ask for your hand."

"You wretch," Félicité shouted, and hit him across the side of his head with her reticule.

The bag was heavier than it looked, as Félicité was far stronger than *she* looked. The force of the blow knocked Richard off balance and sent him stumbling into a settee.

"Filly!" Anne screamed.

Richard sat down hard on the settee, and when he looked up, saw that the princess had opened the reticule, and from inside had taken out a long, sheathed dirk. The sheath she now proceeded to throw aside as she lunged at him behind several inches of steel.

"I'll teach you to insult me," she snarled.

Richard realized that such was her anger, she meant at the least to wound him. With desperate improvisation he seized a cushion in his left hand and swung it sideways, deflecting her thrust, at the same time as he caught her a resounding blow across the face with the flat of his right hand, unbalancing her in turn; she struck the side of the settee and sat down heavily on the floor with a thud that knocked the breath from her body. Instantly he was kneeling beside her, bending her wrist to make her drop the dagger, which he then kicked into the far corner of the room.

"For heaven's sake!" Anne stood above them. "Stop it."

Richard pushed himself away and got up.

"I'll kill him," Félicité panted. "I'll—"

"You'd best leave," Anne said, grasping Richard's arm and hurrying him toward the door, where the servants had gathered in amazement.

"Now, really," he protested. "She attacked me."

"She . . . she's very quick-tempered," Anne said. "And she was deeply hurt."

"By my preferring you?"

She flushed, and sending the servants scurrying with a wave of her hand, pushed him through the door and indicated to the butler that he should close it behind them.

"I'll kill him," Félicité continued from the salon, slowly getting her breath back. "I'll . . ."

The noise faded as Richard found himself on the front veranda. The grooms had already brought his horse back to the steps.

"Anne—"

"We can't talk now," she said. "It really is quite impossible. I must go to Filly."

"Anne," he said, bringing himself to a stop, and forcing her to do likewise, as she was still clutching his arm. "I came out here to ask you to marry me."

"Oh, Richard," she said miserably. "If only . . . Richard, I *am* promised to Henry."

"By your parents. Have *you* promised?"

"Well, I . . . what can I do?"

"Marry me instead."

"How can I? The matter has been settled."

"There has been no time for any papers to have been signed." He held her against him. "Will you trust me? Will you love me, Anne?"

She turned up her face. "Love you, Richard? Oh, how I could love you."

He listened to the door opening, to Félicité shouting, and kissed Anne on the lips. "Then leave it to me," he said, and ran down the steps to vault into the saddle.

His mind and body seemed to be on fire with a mixture of emotions: exhilaration, that he and Anne should be yoked together at last in their opposition to parental and social absurdities; anger with Félicité; and awareness that he was now embarked upon a course that was going to involve him in a violent clash with his own family. But Grandmother Kita had promised her support. That was all that mattered.

The sun was by now noon high, and the heat seemed only to increase the pounding in his veins as he rode back into town, realizing that life could never be the same again. News of this

quarrel would be all over Rio by nightfall. His parents would be appalled . . . and Grandfather. Even Grandmother could not be expected to understand how he had been compelled to strike a princess. No matter that she had thoroughly deserved it. He had scarcely played the gentleman—and on the very day after his return home from three years supposedly spent learning to *be* a gentleman. Of all the catastrophes!

But his father had to be faced first. He dismounted outside the Grant Company office close to the docks, where a company ship lay alongside being unloaded, threw the reins to a waiting groom, and stamped inside. "Wine," he snapped. "I need a glass of wine."

"Well, well," Charles Grant observed, standing in the doorway to the inner office and regarding him with a smile. "What a thunderous brow. Don't tell me that your favorite whore has refused your advances?"

Richard stared at him, all the seething uncertainty in his system again seeming to come to a single hard knot in his throat as he remembered how long he had loathed and feared this man. And been the butt of his wit. With a roar of anger he hurled himself at Charles's chest.

Charles saw the expression on Richard's face and attempted to step back into the office and close the door. But Richard struck the wood with his shoulder, throwing it wide and sending his cousin stumbling backwards. Before Charles could regain his balance, Richard had hit him twice in the face, searing blows that marked his cheeks even as they split Richard's knuckles, and threw him against one of the four desks in the room; he rolled right over the top and landed heavily on the far side.

"You watch your tongue," Richard panted, standing over him, aware that the doorway behind him was crowded with wide-eyed clerks.

Charles gazed at him for some seconds, apparently dazed, and then without warning kicked sideways. The toes of his boot caught Richard on the shin, and he gave a gasp of pain and sank to his knees. Instantly Charles was up and kicking again. Richard tried to avoid the swinging foot but it still caught him a glancing blow on the shoulder and tumbled him to the floor, from where he saw Charles run to the wall, face white with anger, and pull down the pair of crossed rapiers that hung

there beneath the portrait of Jack Grant.

"We'll fight like men," he said, and threw one of the swords onto the floor in front of Richard. "Not guttersnipes."

Richard reached his knees. His flare of rage had already started to die down, and he bitterly regretted his attack on his cousin. But there was no way in which he could apologize, without placing himself once again, and forever, in a position of inferiority. Slowly he wrapped his fingers around the hilt of the rapier. He was not afraid of being hurt; he counted himself a good swordsman. But Charles would wish to fight until at least one of them was hurt.

"Senors, senors," one of the clerks protested. "Surely—"

"Hold your tongue, and get out," Charles snapped.

"Fetch Senor William," someone whispered. "He is at the dock. Haste, man, haste."

"They're sending for your father." Charles smiled at Richard. "To save your worthless hide. Well, I shall have to make haste myself."

His swordpoint flickered forward with tremendous speed; Richard only just got his own blade up in time, and had to parry with a sideways sweep that sent the sound of steel on steel ringing through the room. Richard leapt sideways and turned, blade now in a proper position to meet another vicious attack. This time, however, Charles's impetuosity carried him too far, and at the full extent of his lunge he exposed himself to a killing counterthrust. Richard preferred to back away, praying for the arrival of his father; his anger had by now quite dissipated, and he had no intention of harming his cousin.

Charles occupied the center of the room while he caught his breath. "Well," he said, "I see they at least taught you one end of a sword from the other at Sintra. But not how to *fight*. You should have used your opportunity, cousin. Now I am going to mark your hide."

Now he advanced more cautiously, but when their blades stroked each other, the room became filled with a tremendous slither, faster than anything Richard had previously encountered, and a moment later he was stumbling against the wall, an agonizing pain in his right chest where Charles's swordpoint had sliced through coat and shirt and flesh. In that instant he realized that in addition to everything else, Charles was the better swordsman. That was more difficult to bear than the pain of his wound, or even the thought that he would be lucky to

escape with his life. For the moment his cousin, smiling broadly, had withdrawn to the center of the room, but he was undoubtedly preparing for another onslaught.

Desperately Richard pushed himself away from the wall, and made himself go forward. His only hope was to attack, to attempt to wrest the initiative away from Charles—even if it meant wounding him.

Still Charles smiled, as he watched Richard approach. *He* had no doubt as to the outcome. "The other side next, I think," he said.

Once again his speed left Richard gasping. He parried the first onslaught, but lost his balance and fell against a desk, sword arm flung wide, gazed at the flickering point racing at him in sheer horror, and saw it check, hardly an inch from his chest, as there was a bellow from the doorway.

"Stop that! Stop it this instant!"

His father had, after all, come to his rescue.

Chapter 4

Anne de Carvalho sat well back in the carriage as it slowly made its way through the streets of Rio. She had no doubt at all that yesterday's disaster had become today's scandal, and had no wish to be recognized. She would, indeed, have preferred to remain at home, at least until hearing from Richard again. But Félicité had summoned her, and her mother had insisted she attend. Mama had gleaned only the sketchiest notion of what had actually happened, and had immediately presumed that the fault was entirely Richard's. Soon all Rio would reach the same conclusion, unless she could reason with Félicité.

But there were other reasons for visiting Félicité. Anne supposed she had never in her life been at once so delighted and so terrified—delighted because seeing Félicité have her face slapped was a pleasure she had dreamed of for years, without even realizing it. Only yesterday had she understood for the first time just how much she disliked her friend and mentor, just how much she resented the many indignities she had been forced to suffer throughout the years she had been Félicité's protégée at court, just how much she had loathed the vulgar sport in which she had been forced to partake—and just how much she had despised herself for never daring to refuse. Princess Félicité, aided and abetted by her brother, had been so much the mistress of ceremonies of all the amusements the court had enjoyed, so much the favorite niece of the regent, that with her support all things were possible—just as with her enmity nothing was possible.

Thus fear ran side by side with Anne's pleasure in having witnessed Félicité meeting her match, for the princess's rage and considerable influence would be directed against Richard Grant.

And yet, Anne reminded herself, the Grants were such a powerful creole family that the regent would have to count on their support if he was to have any hope of governing the Portuguese empire from Rio. He could hardly risk antagonizing them, even to please Félicité de Coimbra.

But there was an even more solid reason for her pleasure, and indeed relief, at what had happened. From the very moment that Richard had spoken of his affection for her, she had known that it had only the remotest chance of ever coming to fruition, in view of Félicité's interest in him. But now, she would hardly contemplate marrying a man who had slapped her face.

There was also *her* betrothal to Henry. Mama and Papa regarded that as settled—and so would she, in ordinary circumstances. It was just not possible to defy one's parents, at least without very powerful support. But she was being promised that support. The entire Grant family, headed by the redoubtable figure of Christina Grant herself. "Leave it to me," Richard had said. And how could he fail?

Her exhilarated happiness had even begun to overtake her fears by the time her carriage turned through the archway into the courtyard of the house rented by the dowager princess. Grooms hurried forward to open the door and assist her down. She stood on the cobbles and gazed at Félicité, coming down the stairs toward her, wearing a pelisse despite the heat, and dressed as usual as if about to attend Her Majesty.

"You're late," the princess accused.

"The roads are bad," Anne pointed out. "But where are we going?"

Félicité allowed herself to be assisted into the coach. "Why, to see Richard, of course."

"Richard! Richard Grant?"

"Of course. Haven't you heard? I suppose, living out there in the country, you never hear anything. Richard fought a duel, or something, with his cousin, yesterday."

"Richard? And Charles? My God, is he all right?"

"They fought within a few hours of Richard's leaving your house," Félicité declared triumphantly. "Now, why do you suppose they did that?"

"Well . . ."

"Obviously," Filly explained with contemptuous patience, "because of me. This Charles Grant person must have made some disparaging remark about me, and Richard took offense. But my dear, this horrible brute, who is by all accounts twice Richard's size and a bully to boot, nearly killed him."

Anne stared at her with horrified eyes.

"So now he is confined to bed with a terrible slash up one side," Félicité continued. "Oh, do not be alarmed. He will live. But the least we can do is visit the poor boy."

"But..." Anne fanned herself; she felt like fainting. But she had never fainted in her life. And she had to say something, or she would betray herself. "What happened to Charles?"

"Oh, he has been banished." Félicité giggled. "This great-uncle of yours, this Jack Grant, seems to rule his family like a king. Charles Grant has been sent off to the United States or some such barbarous country. Just like that. A wave of the hand, and he is gone."

"My God," Anne said again. But she was at last beginning to get her thoughts under control. "And we are going to visit Richard? I had supposed you would hate him, after he hit you."

Félicité smiled at her. "Of course I hate him," she said. "I loathe and despise him. But I am certainly going to marry him. It will be entirely amusing."

Anne threw herself back on the cushions, hardly able to breathe, her chest felt so tight. Félicité had been looking out the window, but now she turned her head. "Whatever is the matter with you?"

"I..." Anne managed to get some air into her lungs; she knew she was flushing. "I..."

"I suppose you were quite flattered when he insulted me," Félicité remarked.

"Flattered?" Anne sat up.

"You don't imagine he was serious, do you?"

"Well," Anne said, "as a matter of fact—"

"You do," Félicité accused. "You do, and... my God! What did you say to him outside on the verandah? You didn't accept him?"

"I..." Anne bit her lip.

"You little wretch," Félicité snarled. "You dishonorable beast."

"Dishonorable?" Anne cried.

"You're betrothed to Henry."

"No," Anne said. "Nothing has been signed."

"What does that matter?" Félicité sneered. "Your parents have agreed. It is as good as signed. And you'd run off behind my . . . I suppose you think he fought his cousin over you."

"Yes. I do think so," Anne said, her confusion starting to give way to anger.

"Ha!"

"Well, we can ask him, can't we?" Anne suggested.

Félicité stared at her for some second. Then she spoke in a low, even tone. "You are not going to ask him anything, Anne. Because if you do, if you persist in this stupid, dishonorable course, if you try to replace me in Richard's affections, or betray Henry, I am going to tell Richard, I am going to tell the whole world, everything—everything—you and I have ever done, together or separately, in Lisbon."

Anne stared at her in horror. "You wouldn't *dare*," she said. "You'd be betraying yourself."

Félicité smiled. "Why should I care? I'm a princess. But you . . . who do you think would marry you then? Eh? Certainly not Richard."

Of course Richard would, Anne thought. Of course. But would he? She had reassured herself with that thought on board ship. But Richard had been brought up in Rio, and that was a different world from Lisbon. Suddenly she hated Félicité. Hated her with the fury of impotent desperation.

The princess continued to smile. "Yes," she said. "So you'll behave, my sweet Anne. Our affairs are all but settled. It would be *very* foolish of you to try to change things now."

Anthony Grant stood just within the door of his father's study. "Charles is here," he said. "To say goodbye."

Jack Grant sighed, and leaned back in his chair. He had never supposed that a family as large and as filled with divergent personalities as his own would avoid occasional crises. It was necessary to remember that, and to remember, too, that all life had to be lived by certain rules. He had always proceeded on that principle, and he had every intention of doing so until he died. He could only hope that William and then young Richard would follow his example.

But they had to understand.

"Then ask him to come in," he said.

Charles Grant stepped into the room. He was, as ever, nattily dressed, and he was also, as ever, gently smiling. But the humor did not reach his eyes, which were the coldest gray Jack had

ever seen. It was difficult to believe that this smoldering volcano was Anthony's son; he was almost entirely the child of the beautiful bubbling firebrand Anthony had so enthusiastically married, and so tragically mourned. But whatever the obvious defects of character Jack could discern, he knew he must never let himself forget that this boy was just as much his grandson as Richard.

He stood up and held out his hand. Charles hesitated, then met his grandfather's strong grip.

"You'll do well, boy," Jack Grant said. "'Tis a position of considerable responsibility I am sending you to."

"Yes, Grandpa."

Jack sighed. "All life has a system, boy. Your father knows that. It is nature's way. And the only mistake one can make in life is to break the natural system. That has never been my way, and it never will. You did no more than defend yourself. If it is true you uttered threats, then I am prepared to believe that the words were spoken in the heat of the moment. But Richard is my appointed heir. I will not change that. Had you killed him I would have had you hanged. Bear that in mind. If you will take the advice of an old man, you will forget this incident. Go to Boston, expand the Grant Company there, increase our fame and our profits, and return here in the fullness of time to take your place beside your cousin, when you are both men, rather than boys. Do you think you will be able to do that for me?"

Charles Grant looked squarely into his grandfather's eyes. "I will establish the Grant Company in Boston, sir," he said. "I, no more than yourself, no more than any man, can accurately foretell the future."

Jack Grant gazed at him for some seconds, then released his hand. "Yet it is within our own control to a greater extent than you may imagine." He returned behind his desk and sat down. "Now go and say farewell to your grandmother."

Charles left the room. Anthony Grant hesitated.

"I did what I had to do, Anthony," Jack said. "You know that."

"He is all I have, Father."

"And he will come back to you, perhaps with a more tranquil disposition." He raised his hand as Anthony would have protested. "I know he is innocent in this affair, and that makes it harder to bear. Yet I doubt he is as innocent as all that, were all the facts public. You'd best go with him."

He waited for his son to disappear along the gallery, then left the office and went the other way, toward the sickroom—for Christina had insisted that her grandson be nursed under her own eye.

Célestine Grant was just leaving the room. "He has been asking for you for two days," she said. "And you would not come."

"I am here now," Jack Grant said, and went inside, aware that his daughter-in-law had followed him. "Well, boy?"

Richard Grant sat up in bed, his entire chest swathed in bandages. "'Tis nothing but a scratch, Grandfather."

"Which, unattended, can be the most dangerous of all wounds." He stood by the bed, picked up the cards on the table, and read them. "You have two female admirers, I see."

"Grandfather. . ."

"Which one did you fight over?"

"Sir?"

"Oh, come, boy. You certainly fought over something."

Richard flushed. "It was my fault, sir. I wish you to know that. It was my fault, and then I was beaten in a fair fight by a superior skill. You cannot truly be sending Charlie away?"

"He was leaving anyway," Jack Grant said. "And you knew that."

"Yes, but in disgrace—"

"There is no disgrace," Jack Grant said. "I am separating the pair of you, because I doubt you will be able to exist close to each other without renewing your quarrel, at least until you have both grown older and wiser. Nor is there any disgrace in being beaten by a superior swordsman, unless you hate him so very much that you cannot bear to think of yourself as his inferior at anything."

Richard stared at his grandfather.

"It is something you should consider," Jack Grant said gently. "I will not always be here to keep the peace between you. But Charles's return must await your mutual forgiveness."

"Then let him stay, Grandfather," Richard said. "I do forgive him. I swear it. I . . . well, we have never been friends. And you are quite right, it hurts me to have to admit that he is a better swordsman. But I give you my word that I will not fight him again. Let him stay, Grandfather."

Jack Grant shook his head. "He leaves on this afternoon's tide."

"Grandpa!"

"He leaves," Jack Grant repeated. "Because it is company policy that he should do so, and because you are making a promise you would certainly have to break. You may be honestly prepared to forgive him, but he is not prepared to forgive *you*, at this moment. You will remain separated for several years. Now tell me, was it Anne de Carvalho you quarreled about?"

Richard looked as if he might make a further protest. Then he sighed. "Yes, sir."

"Is Charlie interested in her too?"

"Oh, no, sir. Not to my knowledge. He . . . he insulted her."

"And you sought to defend her honor. Well, that is no slight thing, boy. Rest easy. When she comes to visit you again, send for me. I have not seen her for more than ten years. I should like to meet her again." He went outside, and Célestine accompanied him.

"I envy the facility with which you make decisions, Grandfather," she said.

"There is no facility, Célestine," he said. "Only much sadness."

"Well, will you now make another hard decision?"

He raised his eyebrows.

"This girl my son is infatuated with. She has spent four years at the Portuguese court."

"And?"

"It is a hotbed of vice."

"You know this?"

"I have been told this. In any event, she is quite unsuitable. She is a close relative, she may be past childbearing, and if, in addition, she lacks morals . . . would you not suppose that now more than at any time the family needs a strong woman?"

Jack gazed out of the hall window at the gentle surf rippling on the white-sand beach. "Do you not suppose she might develop such a character?"

"Because she is your sister's grandchild?"

"Because she will be Richard's wife," he said. "And because he is in love with her."

"And do you suppose such a creature could ever be in love with *him*? In any event, Grandfather, the matter of Richard's marriage is already settled. I have exchanged letters with the Princess de Coimbra, and it only needs your consent and that of the prince regent."

"You seriously intend to marry Richard to Princess Féli-

cit ?” Jack could not restrain a smile. “Oh, come now, C lestine. Is she not even older than Anne de Carvalho? And also related to us? And most certainly a member of the court circle?”

“She is a princess.”

“Your ambitions are showing.”

“I have visited the girl,” C lestine said. “She has been very frank. She has confessed that she has been exposed to many corrupting influences at court, but that she has resisted them to the best of her ability.”

“And you believe her.”

“She is a princess,” C lestine repeated stubbornly. “And the dowager princess de Coimbra is entirely in favor of the match.”

“But Richard loves the other one. He has a will of his own.”

“Yes,” C lestine said, “but it is not an irreparable situation. The princess de Coimbra has a son who is also of marriageable age, and who is interested in the Carvalho girl.”

“You spin a knotted web, C lestine.”

C lestine’s chin came up: “I will protect my own as readily as you protect yours, Grandfather. I only wish to know that you will not oppose me.”

“He is your son.”

“He tells me that Grandmother Kita has given her blessing to the Carvalho match.”

Jack Grant smiled at her. “Then you will have your work cut out for you, to be sure. I think this is a matter I will leave entirely to the ladies.”

Prince John smiled down the length of the table at the assembled notables. As he had met them all but once or twice during his week in Brazil, he had difficulty in remembering their names, even their faces, but he had no reason to doubt their loyalty, or their affection for the house of Braganza. They had most certainly welcomed his mother and himself to their overwarm, pest-ridden city. He was well aware that there were those among his council, gathered in a rather anxious huddle behind his chair, who felt that these proud creoles needed careful handling. Possibly they were right, but in his experience people needed to be ruled, not consulted. Unless born to make decisions, men were apt to argue and fumble, when only resolute action was needed.

Besides, he had coped with the far more difficult Portuguese *fidalgos* for long enough. And *they* had occasionally been men

who might claim to have known his grandfather, or even the marquis of Pombal, and might presume to recommend to him a course of action approved by those long-dead, and equally long-discredited, statesmen. These men, without any previous experience of the requirements and ambitions of majesty, were hardly in a position to argue with the wishes of their anointed queen, as interpreted by her regent.

"Senors," he said. "Please be seated."

They glanced at one another in surprise, then slowly lowered themselves into the waiting chairs. The prince too sat, continuing to smile. "I have called you here today," he said, "in the main to thank you, on behalf of Her Majesty, for the remarkable welcome you have extended to Her Majesty and her family in their hour of need. We had never doubted the loyalty of our Brazilian subjects, but there is always a measure of difference between knowing something to be true, and witnessing it. Her Majesty wishes you to know that you have earned her gratitude, now and always, sentiments in which I most heartily concur."

He paused, watching as they exchanged gratified glances. Only one man continued to gaze at him, waiting, somewhat grimly, for whatever was going to come next. He frowned, briefly, and remembered: William Grant, the titular head of the Grant Company, Brazil's wealthiest trading concern. An influential man.

"Indeed, senors," Prince John continued, "Her Majesty's appreciation of your welcome and your loyalty is such that she has authorized me to tell you that henceforth our realm shall be known as the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves."

Once again he paused, and this time could appreciate the stir of delight which went through his audience. At a stroke their dismal swamp and forest had been elevated to a kingdom.

"You may believe," the prince continued, "that Her Majesty and I are as pleased to be able to confer this honor upon your fair country as you are happy to receive it. We look for nothing from you but the loyalty you have already revealed to us, and which we know will continue for as long as the house of Braganza exists. A loyalty which, alas, my friends, must be put immediately to the test as our country languishes beneath the heavy hand of the French invader, aided and abetted by our Spanish cousins, who have proved such treacherous neighbors. My loyal subjects, it will come as no surprise to you to

learn that most of the revenue that should be coming to us is now being paid to the French treasury. But I have no doubt, as Her Majesty has no doubt, that you gallant *fidalgos* of Brazil will not permit such a state of affairs to continue. We look for your support in our determination to regain our entire kingdom, and more, to punish these Jacobins who would interfere with the life of our country. Alas, my friends, my people, like everything else in this life, the preservation of our liberty and our cherished ideals requires money. Without money to arm and equip ships and men, without money to sustain the very heavy burdens of the monarchy here in Brazil, we are unable to offer you effective government, and unable to offer our people at large effective revenge for the wrongs they have suffered."

He paused to survey their faces. Most of the pleasure had already left the countenances before him. But enough respect was still there to leave no doubt that he would obtain their willing cooperation.

"My ministers, with the aid of the viceroy and his officers, have already prepared a statement of the finances of Brazil. As our needs are pressing, I have authorized them in the first instance to issue writs for the collection of a tax upon property, whether developed or not, to a value of one percent of the last purchase price of that property."

He waited, and as expected, it was William Grant who got up.

"If I may ask a question, Your Highness?"

"Of course. I am here to govern with your agreement, not in defiance of your considered opinions. I am no tyrant, Senor Grant."

"Well, Your Highness, if you will forgive me, I am of the opinion that you have been misled by your officers. Not in seeking to raise funds by means of a property tax. This is entirely reasonable. But in the basis of your valuations. All of us here, Your Highness, and most of the people in Brazil, bought their land fifty years ago and more, when the colony was booming. You may recall that the period between 1700 and 1750 is now referred to by historians as the Golden Age of Brazil. Your Highness, since that time the prosperity of the colony has declined. Land is now worth but a half of what it once was. And sadly, incomes have also dwindled, in the majority of cases. To impose such a tax at such a valuation

would be to create considerable hardship."

The regent smiled at him. "Are you speaking for yourself, Senor Grant?"

William Grant flushed. "My company has been more fortunate than most, Your Highness. I was thinking of those who depend entirely upon planting or ranching for their prosperity."

"They, like you, like myself and my family, Senor Grant, must accept the realities of the situation—that we are at war with the greatest force for evil ever launched upon the face of this earth. I, my mother, my family, have lost all we possess to the invader. Would you have us accept that with meek surrender? Our victory will become even harder to achieve if we do not overthrow Bonaparte as rapidly as possible. The money for that great task is needed *now*. To attempt to revalue all the land in Brazil would be an immense task, which would take years. We do not have years, senor. The tax will be collected on the original land values as listed in the deeds registered in each province. You may be sure that where there are true cases of hardship, some rebate will be made. I trust that answers your question?"

William Grant looked as if he would have preferred to argue further, but since no one else voiced support, he bowed and sat down.

"Now I will refer to the war itself," the regent said. "There appears to be very little we can do about affairs in Portugal at this moment. This must be left in the capable hands of our good friends the British, at least until we can build a navy and create an army here in Brazil. But with the men we have available, we can certainly strike a blow against that Spanish power which Bonaparte has forced to assist him in his nefarious plans. It has long been a bone of contention between Lisbon and Madrid as to which of our colonies, Buenos Aires or Brazil, actually has the right to govern in the Banda Oriental. I tell you, my friends, my people, that it is the intention of Her Majesty to settle that question once and for all. What do you say, my people? Shall not the Banda Oriental belong to Brazil?"

Once again he had appealed to them where they would most appreciate it. For how many years had they, and their fathers and grandfathers, laid claim to that rich triangle of land that abutted the Rio de la Plata on the north bank, opposite the powerful Spanish colony of Buenos Aires? And for how many years had they had to put up with incursions by Spanish soldiery, burning their farms and warehouses, and expelling their

agents and farmers, without receiving any adequate support from the government in Lisbon? At least there they might see where their money was being spent, might even profit by it.

"The Banda Oriental!" they shouted, with almost one voice. Prince John was disturbed to note, however, that William Grant continued to stare at him, silently disapproving.

"William Grant," mused the regent. "Remind me of his antecedents."

His secretary checked his notepad. "He is the president of the Grant Company, which is Brazil's largest and most prosperous concern, Highness. He is assisted in this by his brother Anthony. Their father, Jack Grant, the founder of the company, still takes an active part in the business. There are numerous cousins and relations in Brazil. In fact, Your Highness, through his mother, Christina de Sousa e Melo, this William Grant is even a distant relative of your own."

"Nevertheless, he can hardly be Portuguese, with a name like Grant."

"Indeed not, Your Highness. His father, the Jack Grant I mentioned, is a Scottish American, who settled here more than forty years ago."

"Scottish American," Prince John said. "My God, on the one hand the most difficult people in the world to govern, on the other a parcel of rebellious colonists. How the devil did this Grant come to live here at all? Is Brazil not reserved for members of the True Church?"

"The family is most definitely Roman Catholic, Your Highness, although I believe that Jack Grant was converted *after* settling here. It seems that he saved the lives of the then viceroy, Sousa e Melo, and his family, and thus earned their gratitude. And thus, also, eventually married their daughter."

"I remember something of the story," Prince John said. "And now he has grown far too powerful."

"There is yet another Grant son, Your Highness, who is governor of the Upper Amazon, and lives up there in the jungle, it is rumored, in positively oriental splendor, lord of all he sees."

"My God," the regent said again. "A plague of Grants. All set to criticize my intentions. This is something we shall have to consider, Joaquim."

"Quite so, Your Highness." The secretary waited, but the regent had resumed staring out the window of the viceregal

palace at the Bay of Guanabara, at the ships anchored there and the bustle of the docks. Joaquim cleared his throat. "The dowager princess of Coimbra seeks an audience, Your Highness."

Prince John sighed. Every one of his relatives was after something, especially since they had arrived in this new land. And the princess of Coimbra was one of those he had the least interest in obliging; her husband had been his uncle, but had been born on the wrong side of Grandfather's blanket. In view of everything that had happened since—his mother's madness and the early death of his father—Prince John had in fact been brought up to regard his various illegitimate uncles and cousins as possible menaces. Not that Coimbra could ever have menaced anyone; he had been an indolent, utterly harmless fellow who drank himself to death at an early age. The regent heartily wished his widow would follow suit.

"Well," he said. "You had better show her in." He stood up to face the princess, an older, somewhat wizened caricature of her daughter Félicité.

"Your Highness," she said, sinking into an elaborate curtsey.

"This is a great pleasure, Aunt Maria," John said. "But I am afraid affairs of state are so limiting my time, I can spare you no more than five minutes."

"Five minutes will be sufficient," the princess said. "I seek your permission, and that of Her Majesty, of course, for the marriage of my children."

The regent's eyebrows rose in surprise. He knew all about the court circle. As a young man he had taken part in it himself; it had been one of the principal reasons for the breakdown of his marriage. And he was not at all sure he wanted it to continue its existence, here in Brazil where conventions were necessarily more strict. So the possibility that Prince Henry and Princess Félicité would marry was welcome.

"Have they, then, managed to capture the hearts of a creole apiece, all in the space of a week?"

"Only in a manner of speaking, Your Highness," the princess said, "since the creoles in question have spent the past few years in Lisbon. I would like to see my son married to Senorita Anne de Carvalho."

"Indeed?" Anne de Carvalho was one of the regent's favorite young women, as much for her beauty as for her vivacity. The thought of her married to a spineless young rake like Henry de

Coimbra, who would certainly give her syphilis in a very short time, filled him with disgust.

"As for my daughter, I should like to see her married to Richard Grant."

"Grant?" The regent sat up.

"You will agree that both Henry and Félicité are of marriageable age, and indeed, *should* be married."

"Oh, indeed," Prince John agreed enthusiastically. "But this Grant. Would he be William Grant's son?"

The princess of Coimbra nodded. "He is, or will be, very wealthy. He is heir to the entire Grant Company. And his family are loyal supporters of the crown."

"Indeed," the prince remarked dryly. "But I agree that it would do no harm to have them actually *in* the family. In fact, it would be most advantageous. You have my blessing."

"I should prefer you to make known that it is your own wish to see this match take place, Your Highness."

Prince John frowned at his aunt. "Do the young couple not like each other?"

"There are complications."

"Well, I have no time to delve into family affairs. I think this would be an entirely satisfactory match, and I shall certainly inform the Grants that it is my wish that such a marriage should take place. About the other one, I shall have to consider."

"The other one, Your Highness, is the complication," the princess said. "Richard Grant is infatuated with Senorita de Carvalho."

The regent gazed at her.

"She will have to be placed beyond his reach, Your Highness," the princess said. "Or he may refuse to honor even your known wish. These Grants are stiff-necked people."

"So I have observed," Prince John agreed. "And this lad would rather marry his cousin than a member of the royal house? I think that would be a great pity, and reveals a lamentable lack of judgment. I think it can only be for the good of us all to have the future head of the house of Grant under our own wing, so to speak. I can rely on this, Aunt Maria?"

"I can assure you, Your Highness, that whoever Félicité marries will do as she says, in all things."

"I have no doubt of it. I will make my wishes known to the Carvalhos as well as the Grants, as soon as possible. You have my word on it."

Chapter 5

Once again the long, slow ride out to the Carvalho plantation. What memories it brought back—assisted by the still aching pain in his side. This was, indeed, the first time Richard had been able to venture out in a month, and it was a considerable pleasure to feel the sun on his back and the movement of a horse beneath him, although he had been warned not to attempt even a trot.

Both Félicité and Anne had visited him on several occasions during his confinement, but always together, although the princess, having apparently forgiven him for assaulting her, had resumed her proprietorial air. Yet she had been less coarse about it, was obviously prepared to undertake a more subtle approach. All question of marriage had apparently been shelved, at least in his hearing, and when he had endeavored to discuss the matter with his mother she had merely smiled and said, "Time enough for that when you are well again."

Yet he did not doubt that the matrimonial wheels were still turning. What might actually have happened regarding Anne did not bear consideration. She had reverted to her earlier patient sadness when visiting him, and as Félicité had always been present there had been no chance for private words. As for what arrangement she and Félicité had reached since that terrible day, or what feelings Anne might have about the fight, or what pressures might have been brought to bear on her . . . he

was consumed with a curious apprehension as he hastened to reach the Carvalho home.

But he was being driven by even stronger motives. He did love Anne. Of this he was quite sure. He loved her and he would make her a good husband, as he had no doubt at all that she would make him a splendid wife, whatever the irregularities of her past. But it was also very necessary for him to accept the responsibilities of manhood, to restore his self-respect. He had written Charles, attempting to apologize. Presumably the letter had not even reached Boston yet, and in any event it would be months before he could expect any reply—if a reply were made. Why *should* Charles forgive him? How much more sensible would it have been to have apologized there and then, on that terrible morning!

Had he grown up that much, in four weeks? He was sufficiently honest to admit to himself that he was not actually feeling remorse at Charles's banishment, because that had been going to happen anyway. He was suffering from the blow to his pride, that he should have been so decisively defeated, and even more that he should have been dishonorably acquitted of any blame, merely because he was William Grant's son instead of Anthony's. He felt, whenever in the company of any of the family, even of his grandmother, that they were all regarding him with, if not contempt, at least questioning criticism. Is this the man, their gazes seemed to indicate, to whom we are entrusting the future of the Grant Company, and therefore of ourselves? Even his mother, with whom he had shared most things as a boy, had suddenly become a stranger, which was not so very surprising in view of their long separation. But she also seemed far less sympathetic than he recalled. Perhaps even Anne would be unable wholly to sympathize with him. But with Anne, by making her his wife no matter what the opposition, by loving her no matter what the gossips might say, he could regain his self-respect. Of that he was sure.

And on this occasion, at least, fortune was with him, for there was no coach standing outside the door.

But Anne, still in a dressing gown, appeared disconcerted to see him. "Why, Richard," she said. "You are always surprising me. Mama and I were attending to our embroidery, but she has asked me to invite you to come upstairs and sit with us."

This was once again the withdrawn Anne. Richard glanced at the majordomo. "I had hoped for a private conversation."

"Richard . . ."

"It is most urgent, Anne. And I think I am entitled to ask it of you, in view of my condition, which arises entirely from our friendship."

"Our friendship?"

"Could you not send that fellow away?"

She bit her lip. "You may close the doors, Miguel."

The butler bowed, and withdrew. Anne seated herself on the same settee over which Félicité had fallen a month before. She folded her hands in her lap. "You may be sure that Mama will send down for me within minutes. But I should like an explanation of what you just said."

"Why, simply that my fight with my cousin was over you."

She frowned at him, a slow flush gathering in her cheeks.

"I know Princess Félicité assumed it was over her," Richard went on. "But as usual, she was entirely wrong. Charles insulted you, and I lost my temper and was soundly thrashed for it."

"Then I am sorry," she said, "though it is not actually very gentlemanly of you to come out here and burden me with the blame."

He sat beside her and seized her hands. "I did not come for that purpose. You must listen to me, Anne. Otherwise I have no idea what will happen. I love you."

"Richard . . ."

"Listen to me. I love you, and only you. I dream of you, and only you. I wish to marry you, and only you. If I cannot marry you, then I swear I will marry no one, and the Grant family will come to an end here and now. I know there are those who would oppose our marriage, but they matter nothing at all. Grandmother Kita will support it. She has promised me."

"And what of Filly?" she asked. "She is in love with you."

"Filly is in love with no one except Filly."

"Well . . . she is as much in love with you as she can be."

"She *wants* me, to add to her collection. And I didn't come out here to discuss your friend Filly. It is your feelings that concern me."

"Oh . . ." She pulled her hands free, and got up. "You don't understand." She walked across the room to gaze out the window. "A marriage between us would be a total disaster."

He moved to stand beside her. "Because you do not love me? Could never love me?"

She turned to look at him. "Because . . ." He could hear her

suck in her breath. "Because I have lived at court for four years. Do you know what that means?"

"I have an idea."

"Well, then . . ."

"That is your objection? Hasn't Félicité lived at court for four years? All her life, in fact."

"Filly is a princess."

"And therefore must be blameless?"

"And therefore is able to rise above scurrilous gossip. Could you really have a wife who might be the subject of whispers wherever she went?"

"Are you saying you will never marry, because of some girlish indiscretions?"

"I am saying that my husband must know me for what I am."

"As I do."

"Well, then . . ."

"And I am asking you to be my wife."

She stared at him, tears filling her eyes. "Oh, Richard . . ."

"Couldn't you try loving me, just a little?"

"Oh, Richard," she said. "If you knew . . ."

He held her shoulders, brought her against him. For a moment her body was stiff in his arms, then without warning she relaxed, and her mouth was open, her tongue seeking his, as her fingers scraped up his back to find his neck and drive themselves into his hair. Her passion took him by surprise, then he became aware of an immense happiness, as he let his own hands wander, from her shoulders down the curve of her buttocks, so scantily protected by her soft gown, and felt her squirm with pleasure against him.

They found their way back to the settee and sat down, bodies still pressed together. As her dressing gown fell open his hand slipped inside, touched and held those surprisingly cool breasts he had dreamed of for so long. Her nipples rose against his palms, and her own hand slid over the front of his breeches, before she tore herself away, almost violently, hurling herself to the far end of the settee.

"Anne . . ."

"No," she said. "Please. When we are married . . ."

He could hardly believe his ears. "*When?* You mean you will?"

"Oh, yes, Richard," she said. "Oh, yes. If it is possible."

He leapt to his feet. "I shall make it possible. Now. Today."

He leaned over her and kissed her lips. "I shall be back this evening, my own dear love. By then it will all be settled."

"Has Senor Grant left already?" Barbara de Carvalho inquired.

Anne sat down and picked up her needlework, head bowed to conceal the flush that was still burning her cheeks, revealing the wild throbbing of her heart. "Yes, Mama."

"You have sent him away," Barbara agreed. "That shows sound sense, my dear child. You have become such a woman these past four years, I scarcely know how to address you. You have forbidden him to call again?"

"Why, no, Mama. Should I have?"

"It would have been far wiser. I know you are cousins, but when a young woman is betrothed to be married, it is customary for her to avoid private conversations with any members of the opposite sex except her fiancé."

Anne laid down her embroidery and raised her head; there was no point in postponing this moment. "I am not actually betrothed as yet, Mama. The contracts have not been agreed upon."

"Mere details. The Princess of Coimbra drives a hard bargain. But who can blame a lonely widow for attempting to protect herself?"

"A bargain," Anne said. "As if I were some article, to be disposed of. Mama, I do not wish these contracts to be signed."

It was Barbara's turn to raise her head. "Not sign the contracts? But my dear, it is all agreed."

"But not signed, Mama. We can still change our minds."

"Why on earth should we wish to do that? You will be the Princess of Coimbra. Can you imagine anything so fine?"

Anne drew a long breath. "Yes, Mama, I can," she said. "Richard Grant has asked me to marry him. And I—"

"*Richard Grant!* You have consented?"

"I . . . well, virtually, yes. Richard is the nicest man I know, Mama. And he is wealthy. And he is so very fond of me. And I—"

"What rubbish," Barbara de Carvalho shouted. "Wealthy? What has that got to do with it? Henry de Coimbra is a prince. And anyway, how dare he propose marriage in such a way! Has he said a word to your father, or to me? Does he habitually sneak about like a thief in the night?"

"He wished to be sure of my feelings first, Mama."

"Just like an American! They have no conception of manners. I have never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life. And you, without enough sense to slap his face."

"I would like to marry Richard, Mama," Anne said, speaking as evenly as she could. "I can think of no one I would rather marry. Certainly Prince Henry, whatever his birth or title, does not bear comparison with him. Believe me, I have considered the matter most carefully."

"You have considered the matter?"

"As you have just been good enough to remind me, Mama, I am considerably older than most girls when they marry, and am therefore capable of making up my own mind on the matter."

"You think so? Well, my girl, I can tell you that your father and I have discussed this affair, and we have decided that it would be in your best interests, and in the best interests of the entire family, for you to marry Prince Henry. The court is being established here in Rio. It will become the center of the Portuguese world. And we wish you to be a part of that world—not the wife of some merchant, however wealthy, who is your cousin into the bargain."

"Mama . . ."

"And just in case you wish to be a wicked, disobedient young woman," Barbara said, "you should know that the marriage is requested by Prince John himself. Here." She threw the crested notepaper onto the table in front of her daughter. "Read it for yourself. A request from the regent is a command. And he has further requested that we implement his wishes as soon as possible. Do you dare to set yourself against the regent himself? To contemplate a lifetime of banishment from court, of social ostracism? Do you suppose your Senor Grant will wish to risk that? His family might even lose its trading privileges. And I do not even mention the damage such defiance would do to Duarte's prospects, or your father's hopes of advancement. But is some girlish whim really worth risking all that for? Is it, girl? Is it?"

Anne's knees gave way, and she sat down again.

Barbara rose. "Well?" she demanded, standing over her daughter. "Well?"

Anne's shoulders bowed. Henry was, as she had always known, no more than she deserved. Just as half an hour's total happiness was no more than she deserved either. But she could

not possibly involve Richard, and no doubt the entire Grant family, not to mention her own, in the disgrace that would surely follow an attempt to defy the regent.

She sighed, and felt a tear trickling down her cheek. "No, Mama," she said. "It is not worth risking all that."

Richard was well aware that, now the battle was actually joined, it was necessary to proceed with great exactitude. Thus he returned to Rio, and first of all sought out his old tutor and confessor, Father Christopher. The priest listened to him in thoughtful silence, and then sighed. "Of course there can be no legal impediment in the way of your marrying *Senorita de Carvalho*, Richard," he said. "She is hardly more than a cousin by courtesy, the relationship is so distant. But Richard, I have heard that you are already betrothed to the young Princess of *Coimbra*."

Richard shook his head. "The agreement has not been concluded."

Father Christopher peered at him. "You are sure of this, Richard? A betrothal is to all intents and purposes a marriage."

"I am sure of it, Father. As you are sure the church will raise no objections to my marriage with Anne."

"We have none to raise," Christopher said. But his eyes were sad as he stood in the huge doorway of the cathedral to watch Richard mount his horse.

The next stop was obviously to seek out *Ramon de Carvalho* and put the matter squarely before him. But Colonel de Carvalho was not to be found; he had taken his regiment on some military maneuver outside the city. By now the day was well advanced, and Richard had a solitary luncheon at a waterside tavern while he considered his next step. Time was pressing, and there was no word on when de Carvalho might be returning. Besides, he was impatient to take the matter a stage further, and he had promised Anne to be with her again by dusk. Obviously his own parents were next on the list, and while his father was available here in town, the real obstacle would be his mother, he knew. Thus he returned to *Copacabana*, arriving just after four that afternoon, and going straight up to his mother's boudoir, to pause in surprise as he entered and found Grandmother Kita also sitting there—Grandmother Kita very seldom left her own house, even to visit her daughter-in-law.

"Richard, my dear boy," Célestine cried, getting up to em-

brace him. "Where on earth have you been all day?"

Richard frowned. His mother's warmth was most definitely forced. Indeed, he was aware of a great deal of tension in the room.

"I have been visiting, Mama," he said.

"Well, I have been so anxious to see you," Célestine said. "But no matter. You are here now. And I have the most tremendous news. I have here a letter from the regent..." She held up the crested paper. "From Prince John of Braganza himself, enjoining—indeed commanding—your marriage, to be celebrated with all the pomp and glory that the presence of the entire royal family can confer. Is that not magnificent news?"

"The regent commands my marriage? To Anne de Carvalho?"

Célestine glanced at her mother-in-law. "Of course not, Richard. You are not betrothed to Anne de Carvalho. You are betrothed to the Princess Félicité de Coimbra."

Richard stared at his mother. "Do you take me for an entire fool, Mama?"

Célestine's mouth opened in surprise.

"Now, Richard," Christina said. "You must..."

"You promised me your support, Grandmother," he said.

"Circumstances have changed."

"Circumstances? Nothing has changed. Mother has been against my marriage to Anne from the beginning. And now she has won you over to her side, just as she has persuaded the regent to bring his influence to bear."

"That is not so," Célestine protested.

"It won't work, Mother. I would not marry Félicité if she were the last woman alive on earth. You do not know her as I do."

"Rumors," Célestine said contemptuously.

"More than that. She is vicious. In every way."

"So she once drew a dagger against you," Célestine said. "That was pure womanly pique. She had no intention of using it."

"I am not considering that occasion, Mother. I merely wish you to know that nothing, no force on earth, will ever make me marry Félicité de Coimbra. And nothing will stop me from marrying Anne."

Once again Célestine glanced at her mother-in-law. Then she picked up another letter from the table beside her. "I am

afraid that marriage between yourself and Senorita de Carvalho is quite out of the question."

"Mother . . ."

"Because she is already betrothed," Célestine said quietly.

"That is not so, Mother."

"To the prince of Coimbra." She attempted a smile. "You will at least have her for a sister-in-law."

"No contracts have yet been signed," Richard insisted.

"Here is the official announcement, which is to be proclaimed in church this evening. It arrived only an hour ago."

Richard took the paper as if in a dream, and slowly read the words. "I do not believe it," he said. "I shall never believe it, until Anne tells me so herself."

"There is also a letter here for you," Célestine said. "It came with the others, but I thought I should speak with you before letting you read it."

Richard took the envelope, slowly slit it, and inhaled Anne's perfume. "... Quite impossible, on due reflection," she had written. "... the good of the family . . . best for us both . . . always your friend . . ." to which she had added, "your very dear friend."

He put down the letter and gazed at his mother.

"It is difficult to discern the workings of a woman's heart, Richard," Célestine said. "However painful it may be for you to understand that she does not, and never did, love you, it is best that you do know it now."

"She was forced to write this letter," Richard said. "Nor does she deny her love for me in it."

"I cannot say what she feels. But she is most definitely going to marry Prince Henry."

"I shall go out and see her again," he decided.

"You would earn yourself nothing but a broken head, or worse. Senora de Carvalho has written to me to say that because of your reputation for waywardness, she has given orders that you are not to be admitted to her house, and if you are found on her property, you are to be immediately expelled."

"What, will she muster her husband's regiment?" Richard demanded.

"She has the law on her side, Richard," his grandmother said. "You cannot defy the law, any more than you can defy the regent, if you would take your place as one of Brazil's leaders, a place which is yours by birth and upbringing. One of the attributes of a man, seldom possessed by a boy, is an

ability to evaluate the situation, to understand what is possible and what is not, and to dismiss from his mind that which is not. I grieve for you, dear Richard. But what is done is done. Marry this girl. She is by all accounts beautiful and high-spirited. If she is indeed malicious, then rely upon the good offices of your mother and me to improve her character. And be sure that you are doing the best possible thing for your family and for the company, and therefore for yourself."

"No," Richard said. "I am sorry, Grandmother. I would rather carry out your wishes than do almost anything else on this earth. But I shall not marry Félicité. I swore that if I could not marry Anne, I would marry no one. I will keep that oath."

"That is childish," Célestine protested. "You must marry. You are the heir to the company."

"Undoubtedly Charles will marry and have children, Mama."

"Richard," Christina said, holding out her hands, "give yourself time to consider. You do have a duty to the family, as your mother has just said. More than that, it would be quite impossible for you to defy the regent. It would be impossible even if he were in Lisbon, five thousand miles away. But to attempt to do so when he is here in Rio, and likely to remain here for the rest of both your lives... I do not see how you could remain."

"That is exactly my own view of the situation," Richard said. "I shall leave immediately."

"Leave?" his mother cried. "Where will you go? Why, you have only just come back! You have not even recovered from your wound."

"It was clearly a mistake, Mother, to return at all. My wound will heal. As to where I shall go—well, there are wars enough. Prince John has said we must fight against Bonaparte. I shall do just that."

"Now, Richard," Christina begged, "sleep on it. Give yourself time."

"I shall leave Rio," he said, "tomorrow."

"The disgrace of it," Célestine Grant said, wringing her hands. "Oh, the disgrace of it!"

"Your only child has walked out of your house, and all you can talk about is the disgrace?" Christina inquired.

"You did nothing to stop him," Célestine cried.

"I tried to persuade him, as I promised to. I cannot pretend to be proud, though, of the devious way this business was

handled. And you should have known that Richard has a mind of his own. He is *your* son."

"You are upsetting yourself needlessly, Célestine," William Grant said. The family had assembled in the dining room of the Big House, as they did in any crisis, and stood or sat around the huge mahogany dining table. "Richard is a hotheaded young man, but not a foolish one. He will spend the night in some brothel and return here tomorrow morning, ready to acquiesce in our wishes."

"I doubt that," Christina said.

"Well, there's only one thing to do," Anthony Grant said. "We must send a message to Hal Cutter telling him to close the port to *any* vessels, until further notice."

"We will do no such thing," Jack Grant said.

Heads turned. It was the first time he had spoken in the debate.

"But, Father," Anthony protested.

"We have a prince amongst us now, Anthony. Not merely a viceroy. And a prince who, by all accounts, is very much the autocrat. I do not think he would take kindly to a mere merchant closing his port, however often we may have done so in the past."

"But . . . you can't just let Richard sail away, Father," William said.

"Perhaps if you were to go after him, Grandfather," Célestine begged, "he would listen to you."

"He will listen to no one," Jack Grant said. "And why should he? He knows he has been mistreated. He is also far more upset by what happened with Charles than any of you seem to have realized. He wishes to earn his own spurs, not shelter behind his name and his position for the rest of his life."

"Oh, my Richard!" Célestine wailed.

"He will come back to you, Célestine, in time, and he will be better for it. He will be a man, and no longer a boy."

"And suppose he does not come back?" Célestine demanded fiercely. "He is going to fight Bonaparte."

Jack Grant looked at his wife.

"If he is going to die, Célestine," Christina said, "then he will die. It could happen from a fall from a horse, here in Rio. It could have happened from Charles's sword."

"My God, my God," Célestine cried. "What a family! How could I ever have been so unfortunate as to marry a Grant?"

You take my son and send him away to Portugal to be educated, and then no sooner has he returned than you take him away again."

"No, no, Célestine," Jack Grant said gently. "You have sent him away. I warned you that you were playing with forces beyond your control."

Anthony cleared his throat. "But does this not entirely negate our plans, Father? Our intention was that Richard should learn all there is to know about the business. He can hardly do so while carrying a musket. And Charles must still be on his way to Boston. Would it not be best—"

"To fetch him back?" Jack Grant gave a grim smile. "No, Anthony. You go too far too fast. Richard is my heir, and will remain so until his death is proven to me. I say this before you all, so there can be no misunderstanding of my intention. He will return to us. And when he does, he will be far better fitted to control the Grant Company than he is now." He pushed back his chair and stood up. "And Charles will remain in Boston, until I send for him."

He left the room.

"Lisbon, Mr. Grant?" asked the sea captain. "Now, sir, you must know that the only vessels now trading between Rio and Lisbon are your grandfather's. You had best seek passage with them."

"One of them is sailing in two weeks," added his mate.

"Two weeks," Richard said. He wondered why his family had not sent someone after him. He had even been afraid his grandfather himself might come seeking him. But Jack Grant was never a man to waste either words or actions; he knew there was no way to leave for Lisbon for several days. "Well, then," he said. "London?"

Once again the shipmasters—several of them were gathered in the tavern, one of their favorite haunts—exchanged glances.

"I am for New Orleans," someone said.

"And I for Charleston."

"You'd do well to remember who I am," Richard said. "And what I shall be, one day. You prevaricate at your own peril."

The man he had originally addressed smiled. "It is the thought of who you are, Mr. Grant, that constrains us all. As to what you might be, sir, that depends on your grandfather."

Richard stared from face to face in angry impotence. He

had ridden into town at a gallop, determined not to give himself the time to think. Not that he was going to change his mind. To live in Rio, and to have to see Anne on the arm of Henry de Coimbra, and to imagine all the other aspects of married life as shared between them, would be to go mad. But if there was no ship that would give him passage . . . he squared his shoulders. Well, then, he would just have to follow the example of his infamous great uncle, and trek through the jungle—no doubt toward a life of equal crime. Or would he, like his uncle, create an empire?

"Pardon me, Mr. Grant. The name *is* Mr. Grant?" The man was short, and a trifle stout, with rounded features and a fresh sunburn. He spoke Portuguese with a foreign accent.

"That is my name," Richard said.

"Well, sir, I would be honored to buy you a glass, sir. And maybe discuss your problem with you."

Richard frowned at him; he had never see anyone who less resembled a seaman. "You have a ship?"

"I have the use of one. But shall we sit down? Over there." He pointed to the far corner, called for two glasses of wine from the innkeeper, and led the way. "And perhaps it would be politic for us to speak in English."

"Why?"

"First because I speak it more easily, as it is my native tongue, and second because that way we may converse in privacy."

Richard sat down and sipped his wine. "This ship—she is ocean-going?"

"Oh, indeed, sir. But may I not introduce myself? My name is Daniel Runsey."

"My pleasure, Mr. Runsey. And she is bound for England?"

Oh, no, sir. When I leave here, I sail for Kingston, in Jamaica."

"And then for England?"

"No, sir. When I have completed certain preparations, I will return to South America."

"Do you seek to amuse yourself at my expense, sir?" Richard inquired. "I am very tempted to ram those words back down your throat."

"By all means do so, when I have finished, Mr. Grant. But first, a question. You are clearly in some haste to depart Brazil. May I ask why?"

"You may not, sir. It is no concern whatsoever of yours."

"It might prove to be, sir. I see you, the son of a famous house, with all the world at his feet, at least here in Rio de Janeiro, who proposes, to the best of my understanding, to make his way back to Lisbon. Now sir, in my understanding of human nature, there can be only one of two reasons for such a course of action: You are either running *towards* something—a sweetheart perhaps, whom you were forced to leave behind—or *away* from something, some domestic crisis that has led you to form the plan of serving against Napoleon." He gave a deprecating smile. "Sweetheart apart, sir, there is no other possible reason for being in Portugal at this moment."

"You think too much," Richard said. "But there is no sweetheart."

"Ah, well then, sir. I know I can be of assistance to you. You wish to fight all the forces of repression and evil in the world, as signified by Bonaparte. But sir, in Portugal, you will be as one grain of sand on a beach. Now I, sir, am engaged in recruiting men for a venture which I think you will find equally to your taste, but in which every man will count."

"Here, in South America?"

"Indeed, sir. Have you ever heard the name of Simón Bolívar?"

Richard shook his head.

"Well then, Francisco Miranda?"

Richard frowned, and pulled his ear. "He is a Spanish creole, born I think in Venezuela, who became a general in the French army. The Jacobin army. A red-handed revolutionary."

"Not so, sir. General Miranda went to France to seek the aid of the Jacobins in establishing an independent Venezuela. They conscripted him into their army with promises of assistance when the war was over. But this war will never end, and in the coming to power of Bonaparte he discovered a tyranny every bit as repulsive as that practiced by the Bourbons. Thus he has spent ten years attempting to raise an army of English volunteers, men who love liberty and will fight for it. And now that he has the assistance of this Bolívar—a man of ideas, Mr. Grant, a man of determination—to stand at his shoulder, why, now it is possible. An army is gathering in Jamaica. And the descent is intended before the end of the year."

"The descent on Venezuela," Richard said.

"That is our intention."

"With the idea of overthrowing their lawful king," Richard said. "Do you really expect me to take part in that?" He finished his wine. "Nor can I see how it will in any way further the struggle against Bonaparte."

"As to that, sir, the Spanish government is the ally of the French, at this moment. As to the first, I seem to recall that your grandfather founded his fortune by opposing the tyranny of the British in North America, and covered himself in fame and glory while doing so."

"By God, but you are right," Richard said. He had been standing up to leave, but now he sat down again.

"I could promise a young man of your caliber a commission," Runsey said. "More—your own regiment. And you would be fighting for a cause. You must hate the Spaniards as much as any man, after they so treacherously allowed the invasion of your country. Join with me, sir. We shall win. I know it. And after Venezuela, who knows? Perhaps all of Spanish America. Perhaps even Brazil."

From the window of his office, on the top floor of one of the tallest buildings in the North End, Charles Grant could look out at the Back Bay on the Charles River, and, by craning his neck, could even make out Bunker Hill to the right. Beyond the Charles he could see Harvard College, its spires just visible in the distance. The first view fascinated him, made him swell with pride that he was an American, that his heritage had begun right here. The second was an irritation. He was neither a wealthy landowner nor an intellectual, but a tradesman. In Boston this mattered.

That his grandfather could probably buy most of this city, if he had a mind to, was neither here nor there to the Bostonians. But they would learn.

And each day held the promise of something dramatic, an advance in his fortunes. He listened to Cheyney, his clerk, climbing the stairs with the morning's mail. His staff, he thought bitterly. He needed no more, at the moment; the Bostonians were not exactly flooding the Grant Company office with their business. And Cheyney was worth several lesser dogsbodies. He had been trained for law, been articled to a good firm, and then been dismissed. This he had admitted freely, when he had replied to Charles's advertisement. He had leaked information on a coming case, and for a price. Charles had summed him

up at a glance. Long of nose, and lean of face and body. Charles was sufficiently well educated to remember Shakespeare's comment on Cassius. Cheyney too had a lean and hungry look; he would go far, properly directed. He would follow his employer far. And he knew Boston and its people.

This morning he bustled. "News, Mr. Grant," he shouted, as he came through the door. "Some bad, some good."

Charles sat behind his desk, lit a cheroot. Not for Cheyney ever to guess the butterflies that roamed his belly. "The bad first, I think."

Cheyney placed the letter on his desk. "From your father."

"Tell me what it says," Charles suggested. There was no point in employing someone like Cheyney if you did not keep him constantly aware that you understood him.

The clerk cleared his throat. "Well, sir, Mr. Grant, it appears that there has been some domestic discord in Rio. Your cousin, sir, Mr. Richard Grant, has quarreled with his parents, and has left the country. Gone, sir. No one knows where."

Charles flicked ash, deliberately moving with the utmost slowness. "Left the country?" he asked softly.

"Indeed, sir. Disappeared."

"And what does my father say about that?"

"Well, sir, he appears at once mystified and distressed."

Mystified and distressed, Charles thought. Nothing more, at the moment, because Grandfather Jack would have suggested no other feelings for him to have. If Charles regarded both his father and his uncle with the utmost contempt, he also had the highest respect for the forceful old man who had dominated their lives.

"Does that mean you will be returning home, sir?" Cheyney asked, anxiously.

"Home, Cheyney? Now, why should I be doing that?"

"Well, sir, as I understand it, there is only your cousin or yourself to inherit. And if Mr. Richard has disappeared . . . ?"

"Are you suggesting my cousin may have met with an accident?" Charles inquired.

"Heaven forbid, sir," Cheyney rolled his eyes. "But—"

"Richard is rather like the proverbial bad penny," Charles said. "He always turns up. And if he should not, well, perhaps they will have to send for me. But I think we will let them do that. After all, I am here to do a job. You said there was also some good news." What you meant was, he thought, some

even better news. "Don't tell me the Cabots have sent an invitation?"

He had left cards at all the leading Boston houses, and in six months had received not a single acknowledgment.

"No, sir," Cheyney said. "But the Harrington Company has reserved space on your next sailing to England."

"The devil they have." Charles sat up. The Harrington Company was Boston's most prosperous. Now there was something to write home about.

"And in the circumstances, sir," Cheyney said, with the air of a magician producing a prize rabbit, "Mrs. Harrington has invited you to tea, next Saturday afternoon."

"Tea," Charles said. He took the printed notepaper, leaned back to examine it. "At the Harringtons'." They were not, perhaps, the Cabots. But they were Brahmins. And there were two unmarried Harrington daughters.

He blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. Poor Richard. His departure had to do with the Carvalho girl, obviously. He had always been one to let his heart rule his head. It was not a mistake Charles Grant ever intended to make. When he married, it would be entirely for position, and money. Like any sensible man.

He wondered what the Carvalho girl thought of it all. Or would she, by now, be the princess of Coimbra?

The carriage drew to a halt before the curving stairway leading up to the front porch of the Grant mansion, and immediately grooms hurried forward to open the door, to place the steps for the princess of Coimbra to descend, while the butler took his place at the top of the stairs, having hastily sent a maidservant to inform his mistresses that they had a caller of rank superior even to their own.

"Your Highness," the butler said, bowing. "We are honoured."

"The pleasure is mine," Anne de Coimbra said. It was very necessary for her to remember always that she was now a princess, however much she might wish to be someone else.

"Princess." Célestine Grant stood in the doorway, her hands clasped in front of her. Her smile was frosty. She still blames me for Richard's flight, Anne thought. Well, was she not right? Would he not still be here had I shown just a little more courage, a little more of what he hoped and expected of me, instead of remaining essentially true to my background and upbringing?

And can she see how bitterly I regret that?

"Senora Grant." Anne embraced her. "I trust Grandmother Kita is well?"

"She is as well as can be expected," Célestine said. "She will not come out; she finds the afternoon glare too strong for her eyes."

"Then perhaps you will invite me in," Anne suggested gently.

"Of course." Célestine ushered her into the great central hall of the Grant building, and thence to the stairs, while the butler hovered anxiously. "You will take a cup of coffee?"

"That would be very nice," Anne said.

The butler had his cue and hurried away, while Anne followed Célestine up the stairs to the first-floor gallery. She wondered what the older woman was thinking. That she hates me, she supposed. Well, that was perfectly reasonable; there were many times when she hated herself.

Célestine opened the door to the small drawing room, which looked out over the beach. "The princess de Coimbra, Grandmother."

"Please don't rise, Grandmother Kita," Anne said, as Christina made to get up. "I should not have come, unannounced. I..." She glanced at Célestine. "It seemed a nice day for a ride."

Christina squeezed her hand, gestured her to a seat beside her. "And it is good to see you, my child." She peered at her, and smiled. "One always looks for a change in a newlywed. And never sees it, until the first pregnancy."

Anne flushed. "It seems I must be patient."

"It will happen," Christina said. "You are too healthy, too strong, not to have children. And with a handsome young husband..." Again the shrewd, penetrating glance. "Your mother is well?"

"Indeed, Grandmother Kita. And sends her regards." The first lie. As if her very presence here were not a lie! But these women were sufficiently acquainted with Rio gossip to know that she had not seen her mother since returning from her honeymoon.

"As you will give her ours," Christina said. "And the Princess Félicité?"

No need, or desire, to lie this time. "I do not see much of the princess," Anne said, "since she has purchased her own plantation."

"Of course," Christina agreed. "She must be very busy."

Anne was glad she did not elaborate on her opinion of a young woman as frivolous as Félicité de Coimbra attempting to operate a sugar plantation on her own; gossip had immediately started to accumulate around what exactly was happening out there. Gossip that she, Anne thought, need not fear—and for that, she thanked God. But she remained appalled at her own stupidity in ever having allowed herself to fall beneath the spell of so debased a creature—stupidity for which she was now to be punished for the rest of her life.

“Now,” Christina said, “I would so like you to see Inez’s latest miniature. It is of me. It is quite beautiful. I wish I still looked like it. Célestine, would you be a dear and fetch it for me? It is in my room.”

“I will call one of the maids,” Célestine said.

“I would be so grateful if you would fetch it yourself,” Christina said. “It is in my bureau drawer, and I do not really wish any of the maids looking in my drawer.”

Célestine glared at her mother-in-law for a moment, then got up and left the room.

“Poor woman,” Christina said. “She has lost her way, with her son. She turns inward, and hates. I think she even hates Richard. But we have only a few moments.”

“A few moments?”

“For you to tell me of your unhappiness, child. Is that not why you came? Does he beat you?”

“Beat me? Good heavens, Grandmother Kita . . .”

“Ah. Then he neglects you.”

Anne stared at her, felt a tear trickle from her eye.

“Tell me, child.”

“Oh, Grandmother Kita, I might as well not be there. He says I am boring.”

“You? I find that difficult to believe.”

“He finds the very idea of marriage boring, it appears,” Anne said. “And he has known me too long—he says that for him there is no excitement in me.” Now that she had started, the words came pouring out; there was no one else to whom she could confide. “That he only married me to have children, and that. . .” She bit her lip.

Christina frowned. “He does share your bed?”

“Oh, yes, Grandmother Kita. Well . . .” She flushed. “When he is at home. He plays cards most nights, and very late. When we were in Lisbon, I used to play cards too. But now I am never invited.”

"Cards?" Christina said skeptically. "And he cannot impregnate you? There is a sorry tale. It is all a sorry tale, Anne. I share your grief, believe me."

"Oh, Grandmother Kita, is there . . ."

"There is nothing any of us can do now, my dear. Had Richard stayed . . ." She sighed. "His grandfather would have stayed, and taken what he wanted. Would you have liked that?"

"Oh, if only he had," Anne said.

"Men like Jack Grant are only born once in a century," Christina said, with sad satisfaction. "We must all share the misfortune of Richard's weakness. We must pray, my child, that for his sake, at least, and perhaps for all our sakes, he finds himself." She gave a soft smile. "And comes home."

"And your cousin just sailed away, and disappeared?" Edith Harrington remarked. "How very odd."

She was, Charles Grant decided, merely expressing the sentiments of her entire family, and not merely at Richard's behavior, but at the Grants themselves.

And even, perhaps, at herself, for inviting one of them to tea.

It was the first time he had ever actually been inside a house on Beacon Hill, and he could not stop his gaze from drifting through the open windows down to the Common and the Public Garden, the men and women enjoying their summer Sunday. He had been told about the Frog Pond where, a hundred and fifty years ago, their Puritan ancestors would have dunked them for breaking the Sabbath. The afternoon sun, reflecting from the golden dome of the Massachusetts State House only a block away, kept winking at him. Here was elegance.

It was an elegance that had communicated itself to the people fortunate to inhabit this luxury. Edith Harrington was no longer in her first youth, but she had a carriage that even Grandmother Kita would have found extreme. Her daughters were promising indeed. The younger one, Pansy, was still at the roly-poly stage. But Joanna Harrington was as striking a young woman as he had ever seen, in her height—she was an inch shorter than himself—her amazingly slender body, pale complexioned, and the richness of her light auburn hair, so carefully gathered in the fashionable chignon, the calmness of her expression. Yet she was the daughter of a Boston Brahmin, a typical representative of the most snobbish society in America. It was not something to be forgotten—or to be matched. One either sur-

rendered, horse, foot and guns, or one obliterated the enemy with an assault beyond their ability to withstand. He had no intention of surrendering; but his assault, carefully planned last night in bed, must be delivered at entirely the right moment.

"Richard has always been an odd fellow, Mrs. Harrington," he agreed.

"No doubt it's the heat, in Brazil," Edith Harrington said, and gazed at the young man. She did not deliberately mean to hurt his feelings.

"No doubt," Charles agreed, with a smile.

"Does your father really own the biggest shipping company in Brazil?" Joanna asked, trying to bring the conversation under control.

"That's what they say," Bayley Harrington said skeptically.

"It is my grandfather who owns the company, really," Charles said. "And I am the son of the younger son, so as you see, I am merely a clerk." He continued to smile at them as they exchanged glances. "Sent here to develop the company business."

"Oh, you'll do that all right, young fellow," Harrington said, deciding that he could afford to be magnanimous. "I've heard good reports about the way you've set about it. Mind you, I have to say that one's reaction to cut-rate freight is always suspicion. Now, sir, I'm willing to give any man a chance, even . . ." He apparently changed his mind about what he had been going to say. Would it have been "a Brazilian"? Charles wondered. Or even "a dago"? "Just as I'm giving you a chance," Bayley Harrington continued. "But in business it's results that count. I'm sure you know that, young fellow."

"I'm a businessman, Mr. Harrington," Charles said. "Your goods will be delivered in London on the specified date, I can promise you that. It has long been our boast in the Grant Company that nothing impedes our schedule. But I am sure you did not invite me here to discuss business, sir."

"Eh?" Bayley Harrington looked astonished. He never discussed anything but business, Charles guessed.

"It seems a shame," Charles said, "even to be indoors on such a lovely afternoon. Perhaps the young ladies would like to take a walk? We could go down to the Common. I could take you out in a boat, Miss Joanna," he said, with another of his sly smiles. "I am, after all, from a seafaring family."

"Oh . . ." Joanna flushed, and glanced at her mother.

"I am afraid that will not be possible, Mr. Grant," Edith Harrington said, allowing a hint of frost to enter her voice. "Really, it is rather vulgar."

"Do you really think so?" Charles inquired politely. "Because of the common people who do it, I suppose? You have a point. But my dear cousin, the prince, always said—"

"The prince?" Edith Harrington said.

"Prince John, the regent," Charles explained casually. "Aunt Maria's eldest son."

"Aunt Maria?" Edith Harrington inquired. "Do you mean the queen of Portugal?"

"Well, yes," Charles admitted somewhat cautiously.

"The queen of Portugal is your *aunt*?" Bayley Harrington demanded.

"But of course, sir. How do you suppose my family attained its present eminence? We make no claim to talent or industry, I do assure you. And unfortunately, even if we did—unlike you good people here, who have all risen from practically nothing by the honest sweat of your brows—in Portugal, and even more in Brazil, a man can accomplish nothing at all unless he can trace his family back through hundreds of years of nobility. The Braganza family, of which we are fortunate enough to be a branch, is of course the oldest in Portugal."

There was a moment of utter silence, as Edith Harrington's mouth opened, and she stared at her husband, who stared back at her. Charles supposed that neither of them had ever had such an experience in their entire lives.

"And Prince John, as I was saying," Charles went on chattily, "was always of the opinion that it does us all good, from time to time, to mix with the vulgar crowd."

Bayley Harrington was the first to recover. "I think," he said, "that Prince John is probably right, my dear. I'm sure Joanna would enjoy a boat ride with Mr. Grant."

PART TWO



Chapter 6

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Once, Richard Grant reflected, he had dreamed of achieving the independence of Brazil, even of using Francisco Miranda's army for that purpose, once the Venezuelan campaign was over. It had been a dream born of anger against the court and the society that could so wreck a man's life. Presumably he had been a traitor even to consider such a possibility. Yet it had been considered in the past, as he well knew. Only a few years before he had been born, the province of Pernambuco had been the center of a planned rebellion of considerable size. The intention of the rebels had been the destruction of the royalist government in Brazil and the establishment of an independent republic; their reasoning had been that a return to the Golden Age, of which all Brazilians dreamed even if few of them were very clear what it meant, was not possible while they were constrained by Portuguese taxes and Portuguese laws, by decisions made several thousand miles away. The conspirators had been betrayed, and the rebellion had collapsed; few people had expected it to succeed. No one at that time had expected the Americans to win *their* struggle for independence. The concept of a colony, or even a group of colonies, successfully opposing a major European power had been beyond the scope of human imagination.

Yet only a few years later the Americans *had* won their freedom. The idea had not again spread to Brazil, and certainly

the Grant family had always been the staunchest supporters of the monarchy. Besides, now that the monarchy had come to them, the idea behind a revolution was absurd. Even with Wellington's armies freeing Portugal of the French—and no one could be sure when Bonaparte would make his peace with Russia and decide once again to devote his entire attention to the Peninsula—there was no immediate likelihood of the regent's returning to Lisbon. Brazil was the center of the United Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves.

But those were sentiments of tradition and self-interest, Richard often reflected—and he had had plenty of time to reflect during four very long years. It was far easier, as he now knew, to go along with the constraints of a monarchical system of government than to undertake the desperate business of attempting to overthrow it.

There had been several other Brazilian volunteers on board Runsey's vessel, that day nearly six years ago, but most of the Jamaican's recruits had come from the Spanish colony of Buenos Aires, men anxious to learn from experience in Venezuela before returning to their own land.

He doubted any of them *would* ever return to their own land. He certainly doubted he would ever return to Rio. In the beginning he had had no such doubts. In Jamaica he had met the leaders of this romantic and idealistic band, and had been impressed, not so much by Francisco Miranda, who was a professional soldier with a good deal of the pessimism of his profession, but by young Simón Bolívar, whose tireless determination and unfailing optimism had infected the entire army. Simón was only three years older than himself, and possessed a very similar background, however divergent their lives and outlooks might have become. Born in Caracas of a prominent creole family, he had been educated in Europe and had imbibed fully of liberal and democratic ideas—ideas which, Richard thought regretfully, had been lacking at Sintra University in Portugal.

Thus Simón had been early prepared to take up the sword against the tyranny of Spanish colonial government, which reserved all the best administrative posts for Spaniards from Spain, however incompetent, to the total exclusion of the creoles, however talented, and which also siphoned off all the wealth of the colonies for the support of the exchequer in Madrid. That in seeking to overthrow such an outdated system, he should now find himself at arms against revolutionary France

as well was merely a quirk of fate.

And in fact, the Spanish colonial system was proving difficult to overcome, supported as it was by the immense tentacles of the Roman Catholic priesthood, with all the power that institution wielded over the minds of the simple Indians and mestizos that composed the majority of the population. That first rebellion, in 1810, had failed, and had ended with all those who could escape fleeing to Jamaica. From there the leaders had gone to England to raise men and money.

They had succeeded, and after a year training in Jamaica they had again set sail, avoided the Spanish *guarda costas* and landed without too much difficulty, to commence their war all over again. Then spirits had been high. The largest part of the army was composed of English volunteers, and these were some of the toughest fighting men in the world. Nor had recruits been lacking from among the Venezuelans, for the earlier revolt had been followed by even harsher repression. Numbers had swelled, and they had undertaken their campaign in total confidence—only to find that to wage war at all, in a country where there were no roads, where the forests were deep and impenetrable, where it rained heavily, where an army could take twenty-four hours to traverse a mile, was next to impossible. And to wage war successfully, when the priesthood was entirely opposed to them, was almost a dream. “Win over the priests,” Bolívar had said, “and the country is ours.” But that had proved impossible.

Yet, miraculously, the army had been held together and had even won some victories—skirmishes rather than battles. The royalist army in strength had eluded them. The Spanish generals had not wished to fight; they lacked the men, and they were unsure of the support of the country. They preferred to defend various carefully chosen strongpoints, to maintain their control over the great cities such as Caracas and Maracaibo, while they had sent to New Spain and New Granada, to Cuba and Puerto Rico, and some said even back to Spain itself, appealing for men and arms.

From Richard's point of view, this fresh twist of fate was the most absurd aspect of the entire situation. In the beginning he had been able to convince himself that by joining this ramshackle campaign he had at least been taking part in the fight against Bonaparte, Spain's ally. All that had now changed. The Spanish fought side by side with the British and the Portuguese

in endeavoring to expel the French armies from the Iberian Peninsula. The men he was now fighting against were the allies of his own people. Yet he had stayed. And would continue to stay. For one thing, he had seen enough of the brutality and tyranny of Spanish colonial rule, certainly as practiced in Venezuela, to convince him that, allies or not, these people represented a system that ought to be destroyed. He often thought, with grim humor, that those Brazilians who considered themselves mistreated by the Portuguese government in the matters of taxes and restrictions did not know how well off they were. No one was ever hanged or flogged in Brazil for not paying a tax.

But there was more than a cause keeping him here. There were his men. He had, as Runsey had promised, been given the command of a regiment of light horse, which now mustered three hundred and seventeen, even after two years of campaigning; he had found recruiting comparatively simple, not only because of their cause, but also, he thought, because of the romantic aura of the cavalry. And also, he thought and hoped, with a good deal of quiet pride, because of the reputation of their commanding colonel. He hardly liked to admit it even to himself, but in constant warfare he had found his true *métier*. When he thought that he could have been tied to a desk in the Grant Company office in Rio for the rest of his life . . . And besides, campaigning had given him less time for thinking about Anne, now no doubt the mother of more than one child of Henry de Coimbra.

Campaigning, and Antonia. She lay against him, coiled, as she liked best, into a ball against his belly. She was the daughter of the *alcalde*—the mayor—of the village that had become their winter headquarters, winter in Venezuela meaning the rainy season. She was dark-haired and dark-eyed, and moved with a sinuous grace. Richard thought she might have some Indian blood, as did most of the people of Dadanawan. Perhaps because of that they were wholeheartedly behind the republicans, and the local priest, Father Morales, was one of the very few who prayed for a royalist defeat.

In many ways, Richard thought, this village was more of a home to him than anywhere he had known in the past—possibly because, he admitted to himself, he was the most important man here. But it was at least partly because of the unassuming friendliness of the people themselves, with their relaxed ap-

proach to life and morals, as typified by the girl in his arms. She had even mothered a child by him, and for that he considered her his wife. As much of a wife as he would ever have, he thought; he could not see himself ever returning to Brazil now, although it was tantalizing to consider that the vast forest that lay south of Dadanawan was actually part of the border between the Spanish and Portuguese claims. And through that forest wound the mighty tentacles of the greatest of all rivers, the Amazon, where his own mestizo cousins held sway—as far away, in real terms, as if they had been on the other side of the moon.

But in any event, he would never desert Antonia. He wondered that he had not already married her. He intended to, of course, but it had seemed unfair to burden her with a husband whose every departure to fight might be the last. But now that she was a mother . . .

He listened to the drumming of hooves, and was instantly awake. The rains had stopped some weeks before, and he had been expecting a summons ever since. He sat up, and the bed creaked. Antonia opened her eyes.

"You will go," she said.

Richard kissed her on the forehead, got out of bed, and reached for his breeches. "I must at least find out what he has to say."

Now dogs were barking, and the village was coming to life. The noise disturbed little Juan, who began to cry. Antonia draped her robe around her shoulders, scooped the babe from his cot, and held him to her breast. "Then go," she said. "But come back."

Richard buttoned his tunic as he stepped outside onto the porch of the little house—no house in Dadanawan was larger than a hut—and saw that the messenger had already dismounted and was being hurried towards him by Andrew Cullen, his second-in-command. Cullen, tall and powerfully built, with a ruddy face and a mass of curly blond hair, was a typical representative of the Britishers who had volunteered to fight for Bolívar. He came from Somerset, in the West of England, spoke with a delightful rolling burr, and was the staunchest support in a fight that Richard could ask for.

Now his face was alive with excitement, glowing as much as the sun which was just creeping above the trees at their back.

"A message, Richard," he cried. "From General Bolívar."

The despatch rider held out the envelope, and Richard slowly opened it and took out the folded paper within.

"Colonel Richard Grant," Bolívar had written. "Haste. All haste. The tyrants have taken the field under a new general, Juan Domingo Monteverde. I know him. He is a soldier. He fights. And he wishes to do so now. The royalist army concentrates. Haste, Richard. We must be in the field within a week. Simón."

Richard looked up.

"Orders?" Cullen asked.

"Muster the men," Richard said. "Rations and water for a forced march. We must join General Bolívar within the week. Make haste, Andrew."

"Yes, *sir*," Cullen said, and hurried down the steps again.

"You'll need food and rest," Richard said to the messenger.

"Food, Your Excellency. But I will ride back with you, if I may."

Richard nodded. "There will be food at the inn. Tell them I sent you." He went inside. Antonia sat on the bed, the babe still at her breast. "Did you hear?"

"That you will go? Yes, Richard, I heard."

"Perhaps for the last time, Antonia." He sat beside her, smoothed the hair from her forehead, and kissed her. "The royalists are taking the field. This time they mean to campaign properly. They have a new general, Monteverde. He will fight. It is the battle we have all been waiting for, Antonia. If we could defeat their main strength in open battle, we would win the war. Do you understand that? Venezuela would be free."

"And if you lose?"

"We shall not lose."

"I have heard of this Monteverde. He is a great general. And a harsh man."

"We will not lose," Richard said. "But in any case, I will be back here soon. I will come back here for you, Antonia. Will you marry me then?"

She raised her head to gaze at him in surprise. "Why should you wish to do that, Richard?"

"Because you are my woman. Because you are the mother of my child."

She shook her head. "Those are not reasons for Richard Grant to marry Antonia Gonzalves."

"Because I love you."

She looked into his eyes.

"Is that not a good enough reason for you?" he asked.

"If it is true," she said, "it is the only reason."

"It is true," he said. "And I will come back soon and marry you, no matter what happens in the battle."

The churchbells pealed, tolled by enthusiastic laymen, for the priests here in Guanare were resolutely opposed to republicanism, and glowered at the assembling army from the sanctity of their cloisters. But that the rest of the city was prepared to give at least lip service to the rebels was apparent from the crowds that turned out to see the arrival of Colonel Grant's Light Horse, as they rode into the town only three days after leaving Dadanawan, their crimson capes flashing in the sunlight which came peeping over the eastern foothills of the Cordillera de Mérida. The mountains themselves, often capped with snow, lay to the west of the town, but the cordillera actually formed a huge semicircle throughout the north, separating the coastline from the interior. Beyond those hills lay Caracas. And the royalist army?

"But no, Richard." Simón Bolívar smiled at his hussar colonel as he completed his inspection of the troop standing at attention in the square, surrounded by eager young boys and smiling girls. "Monteverde has crossed the mountains. He is not twenty miles away. I would have you rest your men for two hours, and then prepare to move out. Our march commences at ten o'clock, but you will leave later and overtake us." He reached across his horse's head to shake Richard's hand. "I declare that tomorrow will be a memorable day in the history of the world. It will be the day that Venezuelan independence becomes a fact, instead of a dream."

"Amen to that." Richard smiled in return. "I will dismiss my troop, Your Excellency."

"One moment. There is an order I must impress upon you, Richard, as I have impressed it upon all my commanders. But your men are especially affected, as theirs will be the task of harrying the defeated foe. These men fight for an obnoxious and cruel system, but they are nonetheless men like ourselves, who in most instances are only carrying out orders they have no means of disobeying. And we seek to create a nation here, not perpetuate enmities: I would have your watchword be: magnanimity in victory."

"Magnanimity in victory," Richard said. "That will be our



watchword, Simón." He saluted, wheeled his horse, and dismissed the troop. "Two hours, Andrew, and then we move again. I'm for a jug of beer."

Cullen walked his horse beside him. "And will the royalists grant *us* magnanimity in defeat, should it come to that, Richard?"

Richard's smile was grim. "We must make sure that it does not come to that." He dismounted, handed his reins to the waiting farrier, and walked into the shade of the overhanging porch of the inn. The sun was already starting to beat down with pitiless force; they were only a few hundred miles north of the equator. He sat down in a chair on the veranda, stretched out his legs, and watched the infantry assembling in the square, shuffling into line around the fountain which, with its delicate carving of a shepherd and his flock, had obviously cost the town most of its profits for some time past. They were a motley band, for each regiment wore the uniform chosen by its commander, and their jackets were of red and green and blue, often sadly faded. Their shakos were battered and in some cases brimless, their breeches a variety of colors from black to dirty white, and mostly patched, and the majority were shoeless. But no one could doubt their enthusiasm, or the efficiency of their weapons. They were experienced soldiers now, who needed only the taste of victory to be made invincible.

Perhaps, he thought, sipping the glass of beer Cullen brought out to him before sinking into the chair beside his commander with a sigh of relief, there could have been more of them; he estimated they numbered about two and a half thousand, while the battery of artillery that was now slowly rumbling up the street consisted of only ten guns. The teams of oxen that pulled them sent dust swirling slowly upwards to drift on the morning breeze and coat Richard's face and hands. He supposed, with the lancers and his own hussars added, the army would scarcely total three thousand men. But it was unlikely that Monteverde, having crossed the mountains and thus faced the same logistical problems, would have many more. And these men wanted to fight. That was proved by the immense cheer they gave as the commanding general emerged onto the balcony of the mayoral palace, overlooking the square. Bolívar was at his side, as were several other officers, as well as the leading townspeople, although the priests were still unrepresented.

Francisco Miranda held up his arms for silence, and the noise gradually subsided. Richard wondered if the men would

prefer another commander, then told himself he was being unjust. Miranda was the most professional soldier among them; his experience certainly was greater than that of Monteverde. He was also a man of proven courage and ability. But his slight frame, his narrow features, his downturned mouth, presented an unfavorable contrast to Bolívar, standing at his shoulder, tall and strong, little moustache neatly clipped, eyes flashing energy and determination. Miranda's determination was less certain; during the past campaigns, he had too often failed to press home small advantages with sufficient vigor, had too often reverted to the pre-Napoleon concept of warfare, when a general could gracefully concede that he had been outthought or outmarched, and retire with honor. But even Miranda must recognize that if Monteverde was offering battle, the rebels would never have a better opportunity than now to bring this war to a successful conclusion.

"My soldiers," he shouted. "My friends. Today we go forth for our meeting with destiny. The royalist army lies out there—" He flung out his hand to the north. "Not two marches away. By dawn tomorrow we will have brought them to battle. And an hour after that, my friends, my soldiers, my comrades . . ."

There was a huge *gasp*, not from any human throat, but as if the very universe had drawn breath. It seemed to Richard that the world had suddenly stood still, because everything seemed to be happening very slowly, and yet with an utter inexorability. The balcony at which he was gazing simply fell apart before his eyes; the uniforms and dark coats of the civilians became tumbling multicolored balls drifting to the veranda below. He watched his beer rising of its own accord, right out of the glass, to hang in the air as if controlled by a gravity greater than that of the earth. He became aware of falling, and of looking up to see an entire rafter coming towards him—but not, it seemed, actually dropping on him, because they were both falling at the same speed. He twisted his head to the right to discover what had happened to Cullen and saw him falling too.

Then thought was precluded by an enormous rumbling, the like of which he had never heard before. He realized it had been growing for some time, in the split seconds in which time now seemed to be measured. The pressure of the noise was so intense that he cried out, even as all the breath left his body,

and when he gasped his nostrils filled with dust. He could no longer see, and wondered if he was dying. Amazingly, he was not aware of any pain, simply of an immense exhaustion, and of a spreading terror which seemed to paralyze his muscles.

And then there was absolute silence. The excitement of the town of Guanare—the martial tramp of three thousand men preparing for war, the laughter of the girls and the catcalls of the boys, the stamping of the horses and the creaking of the cart axles, the clink of glasses from the bar behind him and the laughter of the drinking men—had all stopped, as if a giant tap had been closed, to end all life.

But only for that second. Then suddenly there was a scream, and then another, and then the entire morning seemed to become a long wail of misery and pain and horror, punctuated only by the rumble of collapsing masonry. And he was still alive. He could even see shafts of light drifting through the tumbled timbers above him, which had been held from crushing him by the very beam he had thought would kill him, but which had managed to lodge itself at an angle with another massive upright, to make a sort of tent beneath which he lay in safety. But how could he get up without dislodging the entire pile onto his chest? He realized he dared not even turn his head, as a lath lay against his ear and he had no means of knowing what it was supporting.

"Andrew!" he bellowed. "Captain Cullen! Are you hurt?"

"Not me, Richard." Cullen's voice came from very close. His powerful hands began tearing at the scattered timbers. "Easy, now," he said. "Don't move. I'll soon have this lot off."

"The regiment," Richard said. "The army," he added as an afterthought.

"You first," Cullen said. Then: "My God." The scrabbling ceased.

"What's happened?" Richard asked.

"Not everyone has been as lucky as you and me," Cullen said, and something touched Richard's shoulder. He turned his head as much as he dared, and saw a human hand; the fingers dripped blood. Cullen heaved away the protecting bulk, and Richard sat up and looked around him. Incredibly, it was still only just after nine o'clock in the morning and the sun still shone; there was not a cloud in a brilliant blue sky. But the town of Guanare had quite simply ceased to exist.

He scrambled to his feet, amazed to discover that however bruised he was, and however torn and dust-coated his uniform, he had apparently not broken any bones. As Cullen had said, they had both been lucky; those drinking inside the bar were only partially visible, their twisted and lifeless limbs protruding from heaps of shattered timbers; splattered blood coagulated all around them. And now they heard the hum of a million insect wings, as every fly and mosquito for miles around sought a place at this unexpected feast.

"The regiment," Richard said. "Round them up, Andrew. Assemble them outside the town. And see if you can find our horses."

He clambered over the rubble to reach the street, which a few minutes previously had been only a few feet away, but now seemed to have receded, and was rent by a gigantic crack running diagonally its entire length. A few minutes previously it had also been crowded, and he realized with a start of horror that it was still crowded, with bodies. But they were not all dead. Even as he looked, people began to sit up, their terrified questions joining the wail of others.

But the earthquake, quite apart from those it *had* killed, had been catastrophic enough. Eventually they determined that of the ten guns, four had fallen into the crack, and two others had been thrown from their carriages by terrified oxen, which were now galloping to and fro to add to the general chaos, a game in which they were joined by a large number of riderless horses.

And the generals? Richard staggered towards the mayoral palace, or what was left of it. It seemed an age since he had watched the people on the balcony falling through space, but there they all were, one or two lying crumpled and still, but most sitting up and nursing their bruises, reaching for their hats, gazing ruefully at shattered swords. Only then did he realize that his own scabbard had snapped in two, together with the blade inside.

"Simón," he shouted, tearing at the rubble. "Simón. Are you all right?"

"Aye." Bolívar scraped dust from his face. "It seems a miracle, but it is so."

"A miracle," a voice shouted. "An act of God. An act of holy vengeance on those who would overthrow their appointed king."

They stared at the priest who faced them, crucifix held high

and towards them, as he might have opposed the devil. "An act of God."

"It is true." Francisco Miranda sat on the ground, a shriveled, dust-covered figure. "It is true, senors. Earthquakes are acts of God, sent to punish those who transgress against His will."

"A warning," shouted the priest, turning to face the dazed and terrified infantry, who were slowly huddling together in that part of the square unaffected by the giant crack; the fountain lay in scattered ruin, seeping water. "A warning, which must be heeded. God has shown you his meaning. Go home, my friends. Go home while there is yet time. Abandon this senseless, criminal war. Go home to your wives and families, and trust in the mercy of your great King Ferdinand and his appointed representatives here in New Granada."

"My God," Bolívar muttered. "We are lost. They are frightened enough as it is. You must say something to them, Francisco."

"What can I say?" Miranda moaned. "Is not the man right? Is it not an act of God? How can I argue against that?"

"An act of God, yes," Richard shouted, "but who can say its meaning? That shock must have stretched ten, fifteen, fifty miles from here. Do you not suppose the royalist army is also scattered and terrified? This need be no disaster, Your Excellency. This could be our opportunity. Do not change your plans, General, I beseech you. Reassemble your army. Lead them against Monteverde while he is still in a state of confusion. We have nothing to lose, and we might gain all."

Miranda stared at him.

"By God, but you could be right, Richard," Bolívar said. "If we appear before him in full battle order, even after such a catastrophe as this, the morale effect will be very great."

Miranda chewed his lip.

"There is no time to lose," Richard said. "Look there."

The infantry was starting to disperse, sidling toward the side streets. While some helped tear at the rubble to free those trapped within, or carried water from the shattered fountain to douse the flames that were starting to flicker through several of the collapsed buildings, their prime objective was to remove themselves from the sight of their commanding officers. "And look there," he shouted, his voice swelling with pride. Up the street walked Grant's Dragoons, somewhat depleted, to be sure,

with half of them walking, since they lacked horses, but nonetheless presenting a splendidly military display. "They'll act as your sheepdogs."

"He is right, Francisco," Bolívar said.

"You cannot know that. None of us can know," Miranda muttered.

"Then we must find out," Bolívar shouted, and ran forward. "Soldiers of Venezuela, listen to me. This priest is a royalist. You all knew that before this morning. His words suit his politics."

"You will burn in hell, Simón Bolívar," the priest said.

"Maybe I will, Father. But I will have your King Ferdinand for company, of that I have no doubt. Listen to me, soldiers. The army of General Monteverde has also suffered from this tragedy. Are we less men than they? Are we not *better* men than they? Now they are at their most vulnerable. With their wagons and their commissariats, their chiefs, their generals riding in coaches with their ladies, do you not suppose they are in far more disarray than we are? Now is our chance to strike the decisive blow of this war, my friends. It is an opportunity given to us by God. Who will follow me against Monteverde?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Cullen responded as Richard had known he would. "We will," he shouted, rising in his stirrups.

"And so will we," shouted another band of men. "And we!" "And we!" The cries were taken up throughout the shattered town, as men, in twos and threes, and then tens and twenties, made their way back into the square, as even the horrorstruck civilians took up the cry.

Simón Bolívar looked at the priest's livid face, and smiled.

Even in the countryside, although there was less bloodshed, the effect of the earthquake was equally evident. Trees lay in tumbled ruin across the road; old stone walls, built hundreds of years in the past to denote some long-forgotten property boundaries, had collapsed into rubble; terrified sheep gathered in plaintive groups to baa their misery at the horsemen; amazingly, an entire stream had suddenly dried up, to come bubbling out of the earth half a mile away.

"It looks as though God has taken this land and squeezed it," Andrew said.

"God is neutral in the affairs of men, Andrew," Richard insisted. "He presents us with various virtues and various vices, and when we have done what we will with them, He judges us. He is certainly not fighting for Monteverde."

But he looked anxiously over his shoulder. His own men, all remounted now, caused him little concern. Where he rode they would follow. But the main army, strung out behind the cavalry screen, was a different matter. The same thoughts would be passing through the minds of the superstitious peons who composed the infantry. Would Miranda have the forcefulness to keep reminding them that the royalist army must be similarly disconcerted?

He worried most about the night; sunset was not more than an hour away. They had marched far and well, eager to remove themselves from the vicinity of the stricken town. While moving toward the enemy, there had been no opportunity for desertion. But under the cover of darkness, with nothing to do but think and remember, and with all the uncertainty of a battle at dawn the next morning . . . how he wished for news of the enemy, for some *certainly* as to what had befallen them. Monteverde could not be far now; the rebels had traveled twenty miles from the city, though the infantry was ten miles behind. Ahead of him was a low hill, up which his scouts were already making their way, their crimson capes showing against the dull browns and greens of the trees and the rocks. He frowned. The trees and the rocks? In contrast to the plain they had just crossed, the hill in front of him was undamaged, so far as he could make out at a distance.

A clammy hand seemed to have gripped his heart. "I shall ride ahead," he told Andrew. "Keep them in hand."

He touched his horse with his spurs, sent it cantering after the scouts, who were now returning down the hill, wisps of dust flickering away from their hooves to indicate that they were galloping.

He held up his hand, and they drew rein, gasping, faces pale with fear. "We have seen the royalist army, Your Excellency," they panted. "It is just beyond that hill. But Colonel—"

"Stay here," he snapped. "Do not rejoin the troop."

He was but postponing the evil moment. But there was nothing else he could do. His brain seemed paralyzed. It did not seem possible.

But as he climbed the hill, and saw the unshaken trees, the rocks emerging where they should instead of being scattered over the surface, he knew that the unimaginable had indeed happened. Then he reached the brow, and looked down on the royalist encampment: a peaceful place, of orderly rows of white tents, and commissariat wagons, and tethered horses, and neatly stacked muskets, and officers sitting around an open fire, drinking brandy and discussing their coming victory. And of cannon. He counted twenty-four guns, again in an orderly, undisturbed row.

But the camp was not unguarded. Even as he closed his telescope, there came a shout from his right, followed by a shot, and he saw three blue-jacketed horsemen galloping along the ridge toward him. He wheeled his horse, directed it down the slope again in a flurry of dust, toward his command, which had been brought to a halt a mile away. His pursuers saw the hussars as well, and drew rein, sending only a few more pistol shots after him. So now the royalists would know that the republicans were on the march, despite all, he thought. They would prepare for battle at dawn.

But God, had, after all, shown which side He apparently favored. Would there *be* a battle at dawn?

You are cursed, Francisco Miranda. You are cursed, Simón Bolívar. Leave our people alone. Take your brigands and go. You are cursed!"

They seemed to face a wall of crucifixes, flourished at them almost like weapons. And they were weapons, the most potent weapons in the world. Weapons that had reduced this army from a spirited fighting force into a disorganized and dwindling rabble, driven from pillar to post as it sought some sanctuary.

Now they stared at the priests, and waited for a word from their general. They still mustered more than a thousand men, despite the wholesale desertions that had followed Miranda's decision to decline battle with Monteverde—was it really three months ago? Since then, only skirmishes. They could take this town and storm it. Behind the five priests barring the road there were pretty stone houses and flourishing gardens, but there were also sullen townspeople, men and women—unarmed and helpless, to be sure, but potent in their refusal to be involved in the damnation that awaited the rebels. Even Simón Bolívar looked crushed. He had come here to liberate these people, not



to burn their houses and steal their food.

Miranda walked his horse closer to the priestly barricade. "We seek only food for our bellies and fodder for our horses, good fathers," he said. "We shall not enter your town."

"We have no sustenance for those that march beneath the banner of Satan," said the friar.

Miranda sighed, took off his cocked hat and looked at it, as if seeking inspiration. Then he wheeled his horse back to his men. "We will make camp," he said. "And I want a conference of officers. You have news of Monteverde, Colonel Grant?"

"My last scout came in an hour ago, Your Excellency," Richard said. "The royalists are twenty miles away, still."

"They're in no hurry," remarked the Irishman O'Duffy, commanding one of the two remaining infantry regiments.

"They do not have to be," Bolívar said. "They are winning the war just by being there."

"Send out more scouts, Colonel," Miranda said. "And when you have seen to your men, gentlemen, attend me."

He sat before his tent, his folding table opened in front of him. Normally it was covered with maps and reports, with estimates of food and ammunition—there was no shortage of ammunition, since they had had no reason for expending any—with lists of sick and wounded. This evening it was empty.

Their dinner table would be empty, also, Richard supposed. His present circumstances were so reminiscent of the retreat in Portugal, seven years before, that he almost wanted to weep. He wondered if he was doomed to spend his entire life commanding defeated regiments that had scarcely fired a shot.

And this time there was no British fleet waiting to ferry them to safety.

"Be seated, gentlemen" Miranda said.

Slowly they sat down, six men in grimy uniforms, wearing shirts they had not changed in weeks, with tarnished swords and unpolished belts, their chins stubbled. Desperate men, for whom the future promised only more desperation.

"Gentlemen, we have reached the limits of our endurance," Miranda said, resting his elbows on the table to look into each of their faces in turn. "By the end of another four weeks this army will no longer exist." He gave a grim smile. "Perhaps it already has ceased to exist. We do our men no service by leading them on and on, to certain death at the end of it. We

do our country no service by senselessly prolonging this conflict. It is my intention, tomorrow morning, to seek out General Monteverde and ask his terms for a capitulation."

They stared at him.

"There is no other course open to me," Miranda said.

"Do you suppose he will grant you terms?" asked Mayen, the German who commanded the artillery. "Has he not promised the king to hang us all?"

"Generals make pronouncements like that," Miranda pointed out. "Monteverde is a sensible man. He will welcome a surrender."

"Surrender would be a betrayal of everything we stand for, everything we believe in," Bolívar said.

"We no longer stand for anything, Simón," Miranda said gently. "And we do not even have the luxury of beliefs any longer."

"We do not have to exist like dogs, Your Excellency," said Reyes, the Spanish renegade commanding the lancers. "Over a month ago we voted you ruler of Venezuela. You have never used those powers. Use them now, I beg of you. Give the command and we will take that village. We will quarter our men, and we will conscript enough infantry to swell our forces. Then let us stand and dare Monteverde to come at us."

"And that will make me loved by my people?" Miranda asked.

"A man who rules is not necessarily loved," Reyes insisted. "But if he *would* rule, he must know what must be done, and do it."

"I came here to make war upon the Spaniards, not the Venezuelans," Miranda said. "My mind is made up. Tomorrow I shall surrender the army, on the best terms possible. Will you gentlemen grant me your confidence in this matter?"

There was another silence.

"I cannot," Bolívar said at last. "I am sorry, Francisco. We have fought shoulder to shoulder for too long for me to contemplate deserting you with any pleasure. But I am bound to say that I consider that *you* are deserting us, and all we have planned for and determined to die for. I am as good a Christian as any man, but I cannot believe God sent that earthquake to punish us. It was merely a stroke of ill fortune, and in the end fortune always balances itself. The country is against us now, but have not Grant's hussars brought in repeated tales of the

atrocities practiced by Monteverde's men as they follow us? Spanish tyranny is still a fact. We must wait, and plan."

"For how many years, while we starve and dwindle?" Miranda said.

"It is better than crawling off to a Spanish jail, or a hangman's noose," Bolívar said.

"So you will maintain yourself as an outlaw," Miranda said. "They will eventually catch you and hang you."

"I will seek the coast," Bolívar said. "And a ship for Jamaica."

"And that is not desertion?" O'Duffy demanded.

"My intention is to find more backers and raise another army," Bolívar said, refusing to lose his temper.

"Spoken like a man," Mayen said. "I will come with you, and bring my Germans with me."

"I will also come," Reyes said. "I do not think Senor Monteverde will grant any terms to *me*." He shrugged. "Alas, I doubt any of my men will follow me."

"Well, I will follow my general," O'Duffy declared.

Miranda turned to Richard. "And you, Colonel Grant? Have you no opinion on this matter?"

"I did not come here to surrender, Your Excellency."

"Then you'll go with us to the coast, Richard?" Bolívar cried, his face lighting up in delight.

Richard bit his lip. "I will hope to do so, eventually, Simón. But I must return to Dadanawan first. My wife and child are there. Several of my men have women there, also."

"Hostages to fortune," Mayen growled. "A soldier should campaign on his own."

"Nevertheless," Richard said, "I will seek them first. We'll meet again, in Jamaica, Simón. But I hope my men will choose to follow you now."

"I doubt many will." Bolívar leaned across the table and held out his hand. "Until we meet again, in Jamaica."

Richard gripped his hand, and glanced at Miranda; tears ran down the old soldier's cheeks.

"By God, but it feels like coming home," Andrew Cullen said, urging his horse alongside that of his colonel.

"It's that kind of place," Richard agreed.

They rode by the river—only thirty-seven now, out of the entire original complement. But thirty-seven was quite a num-

ber, to be following a defeated and discredited commander. Twenty-seven of them were Europeans or Englishmen. The other ten were Venezuelans, six from Dadanawan. Not one of them had asked how Richard intended to lead them back to the coast after they had collected their women.

He had no idea. Indeed, if he had any idea at all, it was that they should remain in Dadanawan. As Andrew had just said, it was their home. Their wives and their children were there. Such a remote village could hardly be the beginning and end of life, but it was the ideal place in which to lie concealed until Bolívar managed to raise another army and begin another war, and Richard never doubted that would happen. Bolívar wore the seal of greatness. Only death would defeat him. Well, he supposed that was possible, but it was not something he would contemplate until the obituary notice was actually presented to him.

And how much better to live that way, in perpetual conflict with the forces of repression, with the very fates, if need be, than tamely to surrender, as Miranda had done, to be packed off to a Spanish prison, after having seen his followers flogged and tortured and hanged. As Danton had once said, it was only necessary to dare, and dare, and dare again. Having once dared, and set one's feet upon that tremendous but dangerous path, one could never cease the daring.

But wasn't that exactly what he was hoping to do? His lips twisted into a smile. He was just coming to realize how exhausted he was. The exhilaration of campaigning, of looking forward to the next venture, was gone, leaving only the awareness of failure in its place. But honorable failure. The thirty-seven men at his back proved that. Now he was entitled to rest for a season, as were they, to regain his strength and his confidence and his vigor, to answer whatever call might be made on him in the future. Simón would know where to find him.

And never a thought to Brazil? To his mother and father, and the rest of the family? There was his past. He would have been less than honest with himself had he not admitted that it was also his future. But distantly. Even six years was too short a while. Anne and Félicité would still be too much in evidence, and he would still be too well remembered by Prince John for his defiance. When he returned, it would be as an old married man, with several children, with a great reputation as a soldier, with solid achievements under his belt.

What would the family say to a mestizo daughter-in-law? He smiled to himself. Grandmother Kita at least would approve.

Utter silence surrounded them, except for the plop of the horses' hooves. The river flowed placidly by, bending to the left before the first of the houses could be seen. On the far bank the tree wall had already commenced, an impenetrable brown-and-green mass, stretching forever, so far as could be told. Beyond the village, it would start again, continuing all the way to the Amazon. *The river.* He wondered, not for the first time, if Dadanawan's river was a tributary.

But by now there should be noise. He hated silence. It reminded him of that unforgettable second in Guanare, when the world had stood still. He drew rein, raising his hand as he did so, looked round the bend of the river to where the houses were.

He could see them now, and his heartbeat returned to normal. For a moment he had imagined the earthquake might have destroyed them too, even if they had seen no evidence of it for the last hundred miles. But there were no people. Only a row of stakes, embedded at the water's edge, with . . . he drove his spurs into his horse's flanks, sent the weary animal galloping forward, drew rein as its front hooves were about to slide down the bank into the river.

There was no smell. That at least was a blessing. But there were seventeen men. Or rather, there had once been seventeen men. They had been castrated, and then tied to the stakes, which were planted in the river, where their flowing blood would attract the piranhas. Now they hung, stripped of flesh from the thighs down, picked almost as clean by the birds above, eyes long disappeared, and lips and noses as well, yet expressions still twisted in the agony they had undergone during their last moments on earth.

"Jesus Christ," Cullen said, behind him.

Richard leapt from the saddle and ran into the village, spurs jingling, sword slapping his thigh. He wanted to draw it, to cut and slash at something, anything, because he had no doubt as to what he would find. But here too, there was no smell. What had happened, had happened days before. There were only ant-picked bodies of women, skirts thrown about their chests, of children, sprawled with gaping wounds in their bellies and backs, of old men, their throats cut, and old women, carelessly shot. He stared at the church, the doors battered

down. Even from the street he could make out the slumped figure of Father Morales. Perhaps he, too, had been mercifully shot.

He ran up the steps to his own little house, and paused in the doorway. Antonia lay on the bed, a hideous bald-headed crow on her chest, still busy with a belated meal. With a single movement he levelled his pistol and shot it dead, before it even had time to flap its wings. Now fresh blood dribbled down that tortured skin, but could not compensate for the ant-scored flesh beneath. Juan lay where he had been thrown, his skeleton huddled against the wall, his skull crushed by the impact.

Richard turned, slowly, and went back out onto the porch. He gazed at his men, picking among the dead. They were veterans of years of cruel war, yet they wept unashamedly.

"Monteverde." Andrew Cullen's face was white with outrage and grief; he had had two children. "May I one day meet him face to face."

"Aye," Richard said, "but fate is seldom so accommodating. Burn this place, Andrew. See that there is nothing left."

Cullen nodded and summoned the men. Richard took another half-dozen to pull up the stakes with ropes, then set them drifting down the river. That way they would, eventually, disappear into nothing. As would the village, already billowing black smoke at his back.

Cullen stood beside him. "Should we not have said a prayer?"

"Aye," Richard said, "in our hearts. I am not in a mood for praying to God."

"Where will we go now?"

He sighed, and shrugged. "Back to the coast. Before the royalists know we are about. We had best go quickly."

"Not quickly enough," muttered one of the men, and pointed. Filing up the track beside the river there came a company of cavalry.

They were clearly irregular dragoons, for they wore blue jackets and broad-brimmed black hats, wore swords and pistols, but also carried muskets in their saddle holsters, and sat their horses with careless expertise. There were over a hundred of them.

"By Christ," Cullen muttered. "We are done for."

"Maybe," Richard said. "Do you suppose those are the men who took the village?"

"They have to be."

"Aye," Richard said. "Find me something white. A shirt will do."

"You can't surrender to them, Richard! Not to those wolves!"

Richard's teeth showed as he smiled. "As you say, they are wolves. Prepare to charge, Andrew, the moment you hear a shot. The very moment, mind you."

"The very moment," Cullen agreed. "But take care, Richard. For God's sake, take care."

"I have that in mind." He fixed a fluttering shirt to his sword, carried it in his left hand, and walked his horse forward, while the hussars fell into line behind him, keeping their mounts in check, swords remaining in scabbards but loosened and ready to be drawn. Slowly Richard guided his mount along the path, closer to the dragoons, until he could see their moustachioed faces and their slack-mouthed grins, could see too their officers conferring. When he was some hundred yards from them he stopped and waited for one of the officers to come toward him.

"You wish to surrender?" The young man, hardly more than a boy, asked.

"I am Colonel Richard Grant," he said. "You have heard of me?"

"We have heard of you," the lieutenant said.

"Then let me speak with your commander," Richard said.

The lieutenant hesitated, then turned and rode back to the waiting company. There was another brief discussion, then the oldest of the three officers rode forward. "I am Colonel Pedro Morillo, Colonel Grant," he said. "You will surrender your force to me?"

"Was it your men who destroyed the village?" Richard asked.

Morillo smiled. "I have been given the task of clearing all republican sympathizers from this area. I have succeeded. Except for you and your men. But we knew you would come, eventually. We have been following you for four days."

"And what terms will you allow us?"

Morillo shrugged. "Those laid down by General Monteverde. Europeans found in arms against us are prisoners of war. Venezuelans found in arms against us are traitors, and will be executed."

"Like those men you staked out in the river?"

Morillo's smile widened. "They were not even in arms, senior. Ah, that was sport. They took a long time to die. But

as your men have ridden for so famous a commander, I will hang them. Now come, senor, I have no time to waste. Bid your men lay down their arms, or we will kill you all."

"You should not be in so much of a hurry, Senor Morillo," Richard said, "to die." His right hand came out from beneath his cape and rested on the pommel of his saddle, the pistol it held pointing at Morillo's chest, not four feet away.

The Spaniard frowned at him. "You are under a flag of truce, senor," he said. "Would you stain your honor?"

"Flags of truce are for men, not wolves, senor," Richard said, and squeezed the trigger. The ball took Morillo in the heart, and he tumbled over backwards without a sound, blood flying to left and right as he struck the ground. But before he had done so Richard was past him and hurtling at the dragoons, pistol discarded and white flag as well, sword thrust in front of him. Behind him sounded the shouts of his men as they followed.

The dragoons were taken entirely by surprise, such had been their confidence. And they were mounted infantry, rather than true cavalymen. One or two instinctively backed their horses away; others reached for their muskets, others for their swords. The lieutenant actually drew his weapon, in the split second before Richard was upon him to sweep his saber through the air and send the young man's head whistling from his shoulders into the bushes. Then his charger cannoned into a mule and sent it and its rider crashing to the ground while a second saber sweep removed an arm and sent another man sprawling in blood and dust.

Then he drew rein, to watch his hussars complete the rout of the irregulars. Horses and men flew left and right, screams and curses tore apart the silence of the forest, and the dragoons took to their heels, seeking only to escape from the deadly sabers.

"That was well done," Cullen gasped. "Well done."

"Casualties?"

"Mr. Rorke?"

The English sergeant major saluted. "Four men hurt, sir. No one serious."

"Compared to seventeen of the enemy dead," Cullen said. "A good morning's work."

"Aye," Richard said. He looked at the still-blazing village, at the slow-moving river, at the trees, at the dead men, listened



to the buzzing of the fast-gathering insects. And looked back down the track up which they had come, and down which the dragoons had fled. No doubt they would regroup, and no doubt plan an ambush, to warn all other royalist commanders that Grant's Light Horse would be coming down this river, because there was nowhere else they could go. Except into the forest.

But could the forest be any more dangerous than this land, where even the natural phenomena had turned against them? Certainly he could not stay here, with the memory of Antonia lying on that bed to sear his mind for the rest of time.

"Well, Richard," Andrew said. "What would you have us do?"

"'Tis a grim picture, Colonel," Rorke said.

"Aye," Richard said. "There is naught we can do here, not until Bolívar returns, and that may be years from now. Will you follow me?"

"To the end of the earth," Cullen said.

Richard smiled at him. "I had not so far in mind. Down there . . ." He pointed south. "I have an uncle, reigning over a vast empire. It is a matter of several hundred miles."

"Through the forest?" Cullen asked.

"Through the forest," Richard said. "It will be better than a hangman's noose. Or a Spanish jail."

## Chapter 7

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The Princess Félicité de Coimbra swept up the great staircase of her brother's house, past bowing maids and menservants, and halted at the bedroom door. "Well?" she demanded.

The undersurgeon bowed. "The princess is well, Highness. She will be well."

"And the babe?"

The young man sighed, and shook his head.

"Ha." The door was opened for her, and Félicité stepped into the bedroom. Here, despite the heat, the drapes were drawn and the candles lit to relieve the gloom, and the room was crowded, with priests intoning their prayers, with anxious relatives, both Carvalho and royal, with weeping maidservants, with the stench of incense and various medicinal salves.

Room was made for the princess, and she stood by the door and looked down at her sister-in-law. Anne de Coimbra's eyes were almost shut, and she breathed slowly and regularly.

"I have given her a sedative," said Dr. Luna.

"Did she suffer?"

He shook his head. "Not a great deal. I am speaking of physical pain, you understand, Highness. She has much grief."

"At so much wasted time, no doubt," Filly remarked, and looked at her brother. "Well?"

He shrugged. "What can I do?"

"My God, I could think of something. Nearly seven years

of marriage, and three miscarriages?"

"You speak as if it is all my fault."

"And whose fault do you suppose it is?" she demanded.

"Bah." He turned away, and went to the door.

Félicité hurried behind him. "I am perfectly serious. Listen to me." She followed him into his study and closed the door.

Henry lit a cigar. "Anne is not interested in sexual matters."

"What nonsense!"

"I am telling you the truth. Do you not suppose I have found out? I do not know how any man can have made a greater mistake than I. She lies there like a sack of corn, with a patient expression on her face. Naturally, she miscarries. She is never properly impregnated in the first place."

"That is totally absurd. I will tell you what is the matter with her. Anne was used to living an open-air life. But since your marriage you have kept her cooped up in this gloomy mausoleum. Why, she never even comes to see me anymore."

Henry sat behind his desk. "It is her choice to spend her time indoors. As for coming to see you, well..."

"Go on," his sister said, standing before him, her hands on her hips.

"That is her choice too. You must know that your reputation has suffered, Filly."

"Bah."

"It has," he insisted. "Seven years in Rio, and no husband?"

"I shall marry that lout Richard Grant, whenever he returns to Rio, or I shall marry no one. It is as simple as that. Besides, it is Prince John's desire." She tilted her chin. "I am betrothed."

He sighed. "It is not merely that you choose to continue that stupid farce. It is also this business of living on your own. Growing sugarcane, indeed. How can a woman grow sugarcane?"

"I do not grow sugarcane, Henry," she explained with great patience. "It grows by itself."

"You live all alone out there, surrounded by black people, engaging in the most disgusting licentiousness, if rumor is to be believed."

"Rumor? What does rumor know of it? At least I am healthy and happy, which is more than I can say for you. You look terrible."

"Well, I feel terrible."

"Oh, yes? Perhaps you have the clap again."

He leaned back in his chair. "What do you expect? Anne has been inaccessible these last four months—"

"Thank God for that, or you would have given it to her."

"These things are inevitable."

"What nonsense! I have never had the clap, for all of the licentiousness you claim I indulge in. I have more sense. And more knowledge."

"What has knowledge to do with it? It is all a matter of chance. Devilishly bad chance. I am in agony. To piss is purgatory."

"Well, then, let me cure it for you."

He frowned. "How do you propose to do that?"

"My dear Henry," she said pityingly. "It is the simplest thing in the world. Come to visit me. Come now. This afternoon."

"And?" he asked suspiciously.

"I shall give you a ten-year-old girl."

"A—?" He gave a brief laugh. "I could not raise a stand for the Queen of Sheba."

"Well, you will have to try. She will help you. You will enter her, she will contract the disease, and you will be free of it."

His frown deepened. "You know this?"

"Of course. It is something I have learned from my black women. So you see, they are not as useless as you suppose."

"And the girl will not object?"

"My dear Henry, she is a slave. Anyway, she should be pleased to obtain syphilis from a prince. Will you come?"

"Well . . . if I thought it would work."

"Of course it will work. But I will require payment."

"I knew it. I am penniless."

It was her turn to laugh. "I do not want money, my dear brother. I want you to allow Anne to visit me. I want you to *encourage* Anne to visit me. To *command* her."

"So that you can corrupt her?"

"If you believe that, you are an idiot. Send Anne to me, and I will make her into a proper woman for you, one capable of bearing children. One whose sole interest is in sexual encounter. It will be like marrying her all over again, only this time she will be eager for your embrace. Believe me."

"Witchcraft," he grumbled.

"Stimulation," she said. "Of the mind as much as the body."

You may come with me now, if you like. I have just the girl for you."

The bells rang out, waking Rio de Janeiro from somnolence. People opened their windows and shouted at other people. "Have you not heard? Bonaparte has been defeated. They say his army is no more, massacred at Waterloo."

Anne de Coimbra merely turned the page of her book. She did not suppose it was as important as all that. Bonaparte had been defeated before, and had managed to resume his career of conquest soon enough.

But his every action, whether successful or a failure, called for comment. There was the art of living. She, on the other hand, did not suppose there was a single creature in the world that cared whether Anne de Coimbra lived or died. Her passage through life would not even have disturbed a leaf, when she was finally called to account. So why not go back to seeing Filly, as Henry recommended? She had nothing to lose. Not even the love of a child.

Her original decision had been born in anger. Filly had done more than merely drive Richard from her side. She had driven him from Rio itself, from his family and his inheritance, in her madly selfish determination to have her own way. Why, oh why, as he was bent on defying the regent in any event, had he not taken her with him? What an adventure that would have been! Even if they had died in some ditch, they would have died together. But why should he have risked so much? She had written him, had told him they could not meet again. He could not have known that letter had been written at her mother's dictation. But what did that matter? She had written it. She had surrendered, because it had never crossed her mind to do anything else. He had defied them all, because it had never crossed *his* mind to do anything else.

Out of the anger, the sense of outrage that her life should have been so manipulated, so ruined, by other people, had come the determination to make the best of it. She would prove a good wife to Henry, a worthy princess of Coimbra, and she would also be a good mother . . . All dreams. One could not be a good wife to Henry de Coimbra. His lovemaking—when he could spare the time for her bed—was a desperate affair, the desperation compounded by a constant fear of impotence. It left her at once breathless and nauseated, and it certainly

never aroused within her the slightest spark of response.

But at least she had submitted, and had become pregnant. Again and again and again. Times to be welcomed as much for sparing her from Henry's embrace as for the anticipation of giving birth. All without result. Those who had claimed that a woman past twenty was too old for child-bearing in the Brazilian climate were undoubtedly right. She had already turned twenty-eight.

She closed her book with a snap. Why *not* go back to seeing Filly? At least Filly was never boring.

Anne leaned well back in her seat as the carriage rumbled out of the town. She had no wish to be forced to greet anyone, and even less to be cursed at—the crest of the carriage was enough to draw opprobrious remarks, even if no one could be sure who was actually inside. This was another reason for seldom going abroad. The prince of Coimbra was identified in many minds with the policies of his royal cousin, and never, she supposed, had any man forfeited his popularity quite so rapidly as Prince John of Braganza. It was not merely his manner of regarding all Brazilians—and all Portuguese as well, for that matter—as having been placed on earth especially for his exploitation; it was also his visible incompetence, the way in which he changed from scheme to scheme, the fact that the war with Buenos Aires dragged on and on and on, without a single victory to make the people cheer his name. Granted, there had been no spectacular defeats, either, but one of those might at least have earned him some sympathy. And now that the old mad queen was definitely dying, within a year or two he would cease to be merely the regent, and be the king.

They were out of the town now, and she could draw back the blinds and enjoy some fresh air to alleviate the heat within the coach. It was still early in the morning, but already she was a mass of clammy sweat. At least, when she reached Filly's, she would be able to change her clothes.

She wondered what changes she would find in her former friend. Filly had become as much a recluse as Anne herself over the past few years. That she also was angry could not be doubted. She had been made the laughingstock of the colony by Richard's preference for running away rather than marrying her. Thus she had withdrawn from all social functions, had had her mother buy her a small sugar plantation, and had retired

there, with her slaves and her overseers. And her reputation. But Filly had always had a reputation—in which *she* had been involved, Anne thought ruefully.

The carriage passed a troop of soldiers returning to the city, and became shrouded in dust and the stench of flesh and leather. Anne drew the blinds again, settled back into the noisome gloom, and waited. She felt the carriage turn away from the main road and down the rutted drive. Filly. Well, she thought with an almost angry spirit of excited defiance, if we are to be tarred with the same brush for the rest of our lives, let us at least enjoy the tar. She threw her mantilla back from her head and forced a smile to her lips just as the carriage stopped. A black groom opened the door for her and assisted her down, while at the top of the steps was Félicité herself, dressed, very unusually for her, in a plain green gown, and with her hair loose, and looking healthier and happier than Anne had ever seen her.

“Anne, my darling,” she cried, and clapped her hands. “Hurry. Hurry. It is starting to rain.”

Anne gathered her skirts and ran up the steps, to be seized and kissed on both cheeks and then the mouth, before she could catch her breath.

“You poor darling,” Félicité said. “You look perfectly ruined. Come in and change your clothes.”

The Big House was small by Brazilian standards, but contained the usual offices, a large ground-floor hall with a reception room opening off it to one side, and a chapel opening off the other side. Up the stairs was the gallery, from which were reached the dining and withdrawing rooms, as well as several of the bedrooms; the others were on the third floor. The whole was made of wood, and lacked a ceiling, to allow the air to circulate freely; as a result the raindrops pounded on the shingles like a regiment of drummers, enclosing the interior of the house in a not unpleasant cocoon of sound.

Anne stood before the open window to be stripped of her wet clothing, patted dry and powdered by the waiting maids. From here she could look out over the estate without the slightest risk of getting wet; there was no breeze, and the rain fell absolutely straight, but hard enough to send people scurrying for shelter. To her surprise, she saw there was no one hanging from the punishment triangles.

“I had expected a larger estate,” Anne remarked.

“It is not very big,” Félicité said, applying powder to Anne’s

breasts and shoulders. "But it suffices for my purposes."

"Do you make a profit? Papa always says that only the very largest plantations actually make a profit, and even then only by rigid economy."

"My dear, I have no idea. I have a bailiff who looks after that sort of thing. He makes dreadful faces, I can tell you that. But this place is just ideal for me. I love everything about it. Anne, my darling, you are looking lovely. Far better than I had possibly hoped, after all your misfortunes. You are not even fat. I had supposed you would be fat."

"I ride for two hours every day," Anne said. "It is the only time I leave the house. Filly, I am feeling quite cool. Do you suppose you could allow them to dress me?"

Félicité signaled her maids to drape Anne in a dressing gown.

"No, no," Anne said. "I am not going to bed. I will have the silk petticoats, and the pink corset."

Félicité gave a laugh. "Petticoats? Corsets? I don't wear things like that about the house."

For the first time Anne realized that her friend was also barefoot.

"But Filly!" she protested. "You might step on something."

"What nonsense! You are here to forget about the world, Anne. You are here to enjoy yourself. At Retreat we make up our own rules, our own laws."

"Our own laws?" Anne asked uneasily.

"Of course. And today is a special day. The peddlers are here. Oh, it will be such fun. I made them wait especially for you. Come along."

"But Filly, we can't see people, undressed like this." Anne hurried along the corridor behind her friend.

"Don't be silly. What are we revealing?"

"Well . . . our feet, for one thing. Besides, they'll know . . ."

"That we've nothing on underneath?" Félicité gave a peal of laughter. "You wait until the rain stops and the sun comes out. You'll see them all moving about to catch us silhouetted against the windows. It's great sport."

"Sport," Anne muttered, but she followed her friend down the stairs and to the back of the house, where there was a covered porch, and where two white men waited, together with four black men, kneeling before an enormous rug on which was spread a variety of wares, from cloth to jewelry.

"You've met my sister-in-law, the Princess Anne," Félicité



said. "Senor Aramal, and Senor Oliveira."

"Of course we know the princess," Aramal said, and seized Anne's hand. "It is a great pleasure."

He kissed her knuckles before she could free herself, scratching her flesh as he did so, for he had not shaved in several days—and judging by his smell had not washed in that time, either.

"Highness." Oliveira was determined to copy his companion. Anne could feel his eyes staring at the thin material of her gown, trying to see through it—as perhaps he could, she thought with sudden alarm, and had to resist the temptation to draw it tighter across her chest.

"And what have you for me today?" Félicité asked, slowly walking up and down the edge of the rug before dropping to her knees and thrusting her fingers into the pile of semiprecious stones. "Oh, these are divine. What are they?"

"Amber, Highness." Aramal knelt beside her and picked up the yellow beads. "They come all the way from Russia. Oh, they are worth a fortune."

"Indeed? And how much are they?"

"Well, they cost one hundred francs apiece, in Russia. Then there is the risk, and the cost of transporting them..." He watched Félicité rubbing them up and down her cheeks. "Two hundred francs, and I am giving them away."

"What nonsense. I will give you two hundred escudos for the pair."

"Two hundred escudos? Why, Highness, I would starve, and my wife and children would starve, and my aged mother would starve. But I am a generous man. Two hundred francs, the pair."

"Escudos," she said.

"My dear lady..." He gazed at Anne. "I appeal to you, Highness. Are not those the most beautiful stones in all the world?"

"Well..." Anne said.

"I will give you three hundred escudos," Félicité said, "if you will throw in this calico. I do like calico. Don't you like calico, Anne?"

"I think it is most attractive," Anne agreed.

Aramal sighed, loudly. "Three hundred escudos, Highness, for the cloth and the stones."

"Good. Now what else have you for me?" Félicité stood up, and Amaral clapped his hands. Instantly two more black

men led in six of their compatriots, four men and two women, each manacled at wrist and ankle. All were young, and obviously chosen for their health and strength. The men wore loose cotton pants, the girls chemises; all were soaked from having had to stand in the rain.

"Straight off the boat from Africa," Aramal said. "Virgin bucks, you might say. Leastways, Highness, as regards Brazil."

"Um," Félicité said. "I want a good one for my sister-in-law."

"For me?" Anne cried. "I didn't come here to buy."

"I shall buy him for you, my dear," Félicité said, and paused before one of the young men. He was six feet tall, had broad shoulders and narrow hips, as well as a handsome face. Anne supposed he was about twenty years old. He frowned as he found himself the object of the princess's attention.

"Now there's a discerning eye, Highness," Oliveira said. "He's the pick of the bunch, he is. And do you know, he speaks Portuguese? Picked it up on the voyage, they say. There's intelligence for you."

"I am more interested in his manhood," Félicité said. "Show me."

Anne opened her mouth in dismay, then closed it again. Oliveira had already jerked the man's pants about his ankles.

"Ah," Félicité said. "Circumcised. Have you seen one of these, Anne?"

Anne started to look, and then hastily averted her eyes. She supposed she had, as a great number of blacks were circumcised; they practised it in their native Congo. But she made it a point to see as little of the slaves as possible. She was afraid of them.

"Oh, come, do look," Félicité said. "They are much better this way."

"As your Highness will know," Aramal said, with a sly smile.

Félicité ignored him. "But he does not seem very active."

The man was continuing to stare at her, and was now breathing deeply.

"Aye, well, likely he's scared, Highness," Oliveira explained. "He's probably wondering if you're about to geld him."

"Silly boy," Félicité said with a smile. "Do you understand me?"

The young man glanced at Oliveira.

"You may speak," the trader said.

"I understand you," the black man said.

"*Highness*," Oliveira shouted, and swung his whip to catch the slave a crack across the shoulders. He staggered forward and nearly cannoned into Félicité.

"Time enough for him to learn to address me properly," she said. "If he can't come erect I don't want him."

"You," Oliveira said, snapping his fingers and beckoning one of the girls. He pointed, and she took the young man between her hands, with immediate results.

"Oh, marvelous!" Félicité shouted, clapping her hands together. "I will have him. What is he called?"

"Oranatoon," Aramal said. "And he's not cheap. I have him in mind for a stud."

"Well, so have I," Félicité said. "Just give his bill of sale to my bailiff. Oranatoon. What a barbarous name! I shall call you Philip. Do you understand me?"

"Yes . . . *Highness*," Oranatoon said.

"I'll have the girl too," Félicité decided. "And let me see . . . that one." She pointed at another of the men.

"You'll want to inspect him as well," Oliveira said.

"Of course."

"Filly," Anne said. "I really must be going. I—"

"What nonsense," Félicité said. "You are going to spend the night. I arranged it with Henry. So stop worrying. Thank you very much, Senor Aramal. These three will do me very nicely. Now strike off their chains."

Aramal nodded. "Come along," he said. "Outside with you."

"Strike them off here."

Aramal frowned. "Here, *Highness*? These men are straight off the boat. They could be wild."

"Don't be absurd," Félicité said. "You're not wild, are you, Philip?" As he did not immediately respond, she thrust a long-nailed forefinger into his belly. "You. I am talking to you. Are you wild?"

"No, *Highness*," Oranatoon said.

"I did not think so. Tell your friends that if they behave themselves and do as I tell them, they will be very happy. If they disobey me for an instant, I will have his balls off and I will cauterize her fanny so she'll never have a man. Tell them that."

Oranatoon spoke in a foreign language, while Oliveira and Aramal exchanged glances.

"You have a way with you, Highness," Aramal said. "Strike off those chains, man."

Hammers and chisels were produced, and the cuffs were split open. The remaining slaves were hustled from the porch, out into the rain, where they waited, secured to the saddles of the traders' horses, while Aramal went in search of the bailiff.

"I think they're splendid," Félicité declared. "Don't you think they're splendid, Anne?"

"Splendid?"

"We're going to have such fun with them. Come along. You, Philip, tell them to come along."

Oranatoon spoke to the others, and the three slaves followed their new mistress through the door and along a corridor to the right into a room, empty of furniture except for a large bed. The only windows were high in the walls, so there was no risk of being overlooked.

"Filly," Anne said, as her friend closed the door. "We can't stay in here with these people. They could murder us."

"Now, why should they do that?" she asked. "You're not going to murder us, are you, Philip?"

"No, Highness," Oranatoon said. But to Anne's ears, he did not sound completely convincing.

"Because if you do, they'll catch you and burn you alive. Very slowly. You know that?"

"I know that, Highness."

"Good. Now, I have bought you for my sister-in-law here."

For the first time Oranatoon looked directly at Anne, and she felt almost faint.

"And I am sure that she wishes to sample you. So take off your trousers and lie on that bed. Tell your friends to stand against the wall, but they may watch. It makes them more eager," she explained to Anne. "Well, it makes me eager too, to watch. And I've never watched a white woman before."

It took Anne several seconds to understand the enormity of what was being proposed.

"You're out of your mind," she said.

"What, are you nervous? Afraid of being hurt? You're as well as you have ever been. I can tell that at a glance. And you can always stop. I often do that—leave them just stranded, as hard as hammers. Oh, all right—I'll go first. You..." She pointed to the other young man. "On the bed."

"Filly!" Anne grasped her arm. "You're not serious. You can't be. For heaven's sake, you... you're a virgin!"

"What nonsense!" Félicité said. "I abandoned that a long time ago. Richard will just have to put up with it. He left me, after all."

"But Filly. A *black* man?"

"They're the best," Félicité said seriously. "Look."

The other young man had already climbed on to the bed, and was lying there, in a state of tremendous arousal.

"They can stay like that for *hours*," Félicité said. "I tell them that if they stay like that, they get extra food and rum."

"But . . . suppose you got pregnant?"

"Of course I won't get pregnant. I use a syringe. Anne, you mustn't miss this. It's the loveliest sensation in the world. When you think of a poor limp sock like Henry . . . you have no *idea*. I tell you what. We'll mount together. You and me. We can hold hands while we do it. We can touch each other."

Her cheeks were flaming pink and her breath was coming in short gasps. She had already released the ties of her dressing gown and was virtually naked, her belly fluttering in time to her heart. Anne gazed at her in total horror, then at the man Oranatoon, who had also removed his drawers and was looking at her. Then she pulled herself free and ran from the room.

"Grandmother is not well," Célestine Grant said, and added as an afterthought, "Your Highness."

Her cold features were more frigidly pronounced than ever. But then, Anne thought, she must hate me more than any other creature on earth—in nearly eight years not a word had been heard either from or of Richard.

"All the more reason for my seeing her, senora," she said. "I do not visit often enough."

"That is true," Célestine said, and stepped aside.

The huge bedchamber, with its great windows overlooking the beach and the sea, seemed crowded. In addition to the maidservants in attendance, there was also Inez Cutter. Everyone was looking at the princess of Coimbra as if a dangerous snake had suddenly been introduced into their midst.

"Anne," Christina Grant said. "Anne de Carvalho. Come here, my child."

She seemed to have shrunk, a mere wisp of a once-beautiful woman supported by the pillows in the center of the bed. Anne advanced slowly. She had not realized just how frail Grandmother Kita had become. And she had not come here to sit

with the sick. She had come here to . . . confess? That was at least a possibility. She could not bear the thoughts that raced around and around in her mind, but they were not thoughts to be admitted to a priest, either. As for her mother . . . No, the only person who would not instantly condemn her was dear Grandmother Kita, who had experienced so much—if only half of what was rumored about her was true—that she might be able to advise, to recommend . . . at least to share the temptation.

And now even that avenue of hope was closed to her.

"Anne," Christina said again, and took her hand; the once-strong fingers could do no more than brush her flesh. "How good to see you. You are looking well. I had heard that you lost another child."

"I do not think that I am intended to be a mother, Grandmother Kita," Anne said.

A faint smile. "Who can say whether that is altogether bad?" she said. "You would have been a mother for Richard."

"Grandmother . . ."

"Have you any news of him?" Christina asked.

Anne shook her head, felt the fingers relax their grip on her own.

"I had hoped he would be here," Christina said, "once more before I died. I had hoped that."

"He will be, Grandmother," Anne said. "He will be."

Another faint movement of the lips. "It will have to be soon, Anne. Soon. Too late for me. And too late for you." Her eyes closed.

"She must rest now," Célestine said.

Anne sighed, turned away, attempted a smile at Inez and received none in reply. She went to the door, accompanied by Célestine.

"I do not think you should come again, Highness," Célestine said. "It is tiring for Grandmother. She needs to rest. And the sight of you reminds her of too many things." She looked into Anne's eyes. "You remind us all of too many things."

Anne would not lower her gaze. "I miss your son as much as you do, Senora Grant," she said.

"I doubt that, Your Highness," Célestine said. "You have other . . . interests." Her mouth twisted. "Go back to your games, Princess. And leave my mother-in-law to die in peace."

"Grandmother Kita is dying." Anne looked the length of the cedarwood dining table at her husband, some fifteen feet away.

Henry ate an avocado, noisily and messily; she would not have supposed it possible to make such a noise while eating an avocado, but he managed it.

"She must be seventy," he said. "The allotted span."

Anne sighed. "I suppose I did not expect her ever to die. I don't think anyone did. I can't help feeling it's because both her grandsons are far away."

"She's have died sooner if they'd stayed," Henry said, and wiped his lips with his linen handkerchief. "If I ever catch hold of Richard—refusing to marry Filly, indeed." He pushed back his chair and got up. "Come along upstairs."

She had been staring into her wineglass. Now she raised her head. "Oh, good lord, Henry, please." She glanced at the footmen lining the walls.

"Quickly," he said. "I can't wait. I've never felt more like it in my life."

She sighed. "I thought you weren't well."

"I wasn't. But I'm completely cured now. Filly cured me. Just as she's cured you."

"Cured me?"

He took her hands and pulled her to her feet. "Put some want into your belly. Don't tell me she hasn't. And don't tell me you're still feeling weak, either. That was months ago."

"I haven't seen Filly for weeks," Anne protested. She followed him to the door. However much she dreaded what was coming, however much she hated being displayed before her domestics on her reluctant way to bed, it was her duty; he was her husband. She could only pray that he would be quick.

"Why not?" he said.

"Because I do not choose to."

A footman opened the door to their private sitting room, from which the bedrooms extended.

"I wish you to. I thought I had made that clear to you. She is your sister-in-law. And she is your best friend. She will be good for you."

"I don't think you really understand anything about Filly," Anne said. "She has taken up a way of life I am really not prepared to share."

He stared at her for some seconds, then at the row of maids

waiting by her bedroom door. "Out," he said, and snapped his fingers. "Out."

They looked at their mistress. She nodded. "You may leave us."

The girls curtsied, and sidled from the room.

"You too," Henry shouted at the footman. "And close the door."

The man bowed, and withdrew. Anne sat down on the settee, her hands on her lap.

"You," Henry said, pointing at her, "do you dare to criticize my sister?"

"Of course I do. When she requires criticism."

"You are not fit to lick her toes."

Anne arranged her face into a pleasant expression, and waited.

"You are just a fat lump of shit," he bellowed. "Call yourself a wife? When have you been a wife to me?"

"I have allowed you to impregnate me several times," she said.

"And that is being a wife? A wife bears her husband's children. She does not just have miscarriages. A wife looks after her husband when he is ill. She does not turn her back on him."

"I shall be happy to care for you if you are genuinely ill, Henry," she said. "When you are suffering from some disgusting disease you have brought upon yourself, I should prefer not to know."

"And that is being a wife?" He stood above her. "A wife endeavors to make herself sufficiently attractive so that her husband does not need to wander."

"Am I unattractive?"

"You are a lifeless lump of flesh," he bawled. "Look at you, sitting there. Are you paralyzed? Get up. Get up and make love to me."

"Oh, really, Henry," she said. "I'm not in the mood for foolishness tonight. If you wish to go to bed, let me call my maids back to undress me."

"You," he said, pointing. "Lie down on the floor."

"Henry, you are being utterly stupid."

"I am your husband," he shouted. "I want you, now, on the floor. Pull your skirts to your waist and get down on the floor."

She gazed at him for several seconds. But undoubtedly to obey was the simplest course open to her. She got up, lifted



her skirts, knelt, and then lay back. Resting her head on the carpet, she closed her eyes.

"Can you not bear to look at me?" he sneered.

"That's right," she said. "I cannot bear to look at you, Henry."

She waited, felt his hands on her thighs, felt a slight caress, and opened her eyes just in time to see his hand slashing through the air to hit her across the cheek, sending her head sideways to meet his other hand, then slamming it back the other way.

"Bitch," he shrieked. "Bitch. You . . ."

Desperately she tried to catch his wrists, and failing that, to protect her face, so he hit her in the belly instead. She moaned, and retched, and tried to roll over, and he got up to kick her in the thigh. She attempted to crawl, and he straddled her back, holding her hair to pull her head up, so that she looked at him upside down.

"You," he said, "had better learn, or so help me God, I am going to have one of my whores in here in front of you. And the next time I get the clap, I'm going to lose it in you, you damned cold-blooded bitch."

The drumbeat echoed, a slow, thunderous note. People shifted their feet and cast anxious glances at the sky, where the clouds were gathering for the noonday rain. But the ceremony could not be rushed. Christina Maria Theresa de Sousa e Melo Grant was not merely the wife of the founder of the Grant Company. She was the woman who had survived the Lisbon earthquake, who had been miraculously saved from drowning, who had adventured up the Amazon. And she was also a relative of the great marquis of Pombal, as well as of the queen. All Rio was attending her funeral, except for the queen herself—also soon to be in a grave, it was rumored. Every street was packed, and the cemetery seemed to sink beneath the weight of humanity.

The crowd of mourners stared—at Prince John and his wife, faces rigid; at the royal princes, shuffling restlessly; at the Grant family, the sons with their shoulders bowed, the daughters with veils thrown back to show the tears on their cheeks, the widower, the great Jack Grant himself, staring at the coffin as if he would not believe what lay within. But there were no grandchildren. They were far away.

The other relatives—the Carvalhos and the Sousas—and the prince and princess of Coimbra stood together. Princess Anne was heavily veiled, so that not a trace of her face could

be seen, and she moved stiffly, as if too much grief had left her arthritic. The Princess Félicité, in contrast, had thrown back her veil and looked about her with bold, inquisitive eyes. She even smiled. She had no need for grief. She had never really known the famous Christina. This was merely an occasion.

The priests began to hurry as the clouds swept across the sun. The coffin was carried into the family vault; Jack Grant and his sons and daughters followed. Etiquette demanded that all those who had attended the cemetery should wait until the door was replaced and locked, but now the first drops of rain began to fall. The crowd dispersed, hurrying for the shelter of the trees, running for their various equipages.

"There is no point in staying here and getting wet," Félicité pointed out, as Anne continued to watch the vault.

She seemed to awaken from a deep sleep, and half-turned her head. "May I come with you?"

Félicité raised her eyebrows. "Are you sure you wish to?"

Henry gave a brief laugh. "She wishes to complain. Go with Filly, Anne. And remember what I said."

Félicité hurried her across the trampled grass, the muddy paths. Now it was raining quite heavily, great drops slashing into their hats to bring the brims drooping down, to soak their silk pelisses.

"We shall catch cold. I know we shall catch cold." But Félicité's driver had seen her coming, had urged the carriage forward. The two women climbed in.

"Absolutely ruined," Félicité said, peering at her soaked shoes and then kicking them off. "Really, I don't know why people can't be buried in private. It wasn't as if she was important. Not anymore, at least. Can you imagine what will happen when the old queen dies? We'll be standing there for hours." She glanced at her sister-in-law, who was staring out the window. "You've been quarreling with Henry. Again."

Anne turned back to face Félicité, and pulled the veil from her face. Félicité stared in consternation at Anne's black eyes.

"My God! He's been abusing you. Oh, my dear!"

"There is a bruise on my thigh the size of an orange," Anne said. "And I may have a cracked rib."

"Good Lord! Didn't you hit him back?"

"I . . . I never thought of it."

"You're soft. I'd have twisted his balls right off. But why did he do it?"

"I don't excite him."

"With those tits?"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't be so vulgar. Don't you understand? I hate him, and he hates me. Now he is threatening me with . . . with all manner of things."

"Well," Félicité said. "I suppose a man is entitled to beat his wife. Have you spoken to Father Juan?"

"Father Juan knows what happened. I think he feels I deserved it."

"Well . . . we could speak with the bishop. He won't agree to an annulment, of course, not after seven years of marriage. But he might have a word with Henry."

"What good would that do?" Anne sighed. "If I am married to Henry, then I'm married to Henry. If that's the way he wants me, then that's the way I'll have to be."

Félicité stared at her. "Do you know?" she said. "You are a very good woman. Far too good for this world. If I were you, I'd take a lover."

"That seems to be what he wishes me to do," Anne said. "Properly supervised by you."

Félicité tapped on the hatch. "Do not go into town," she called. "Take us home." She took Anne's hands. "My dear, I am absolutely delighted." She smiled. "I'll give you Philip, just as I wanted to in the first place. You've never known anything like him. Oh, you'll get your own back. It'll be such fun."

She watched a tear trickle from Anne's eye.

"I wish to be alone," Anne said. "No peepholes, either."

Félicité pouted. "Oh, really, Anne. You are the most absurd creature."

"Alone," Anne said. "The first time. Perhaps afterwards . . ."

"Promise?"

"No," Anne said. "I might not be able to do it again."

Félicité giggled. "Oh, you will. You won't be able to let it alone. He's so good."

"You have sampled him, then."

"Well, of course. You didn't seem to want him." She opened the door to one of the small bedrooms. "I'll send you a maid."

"No maid," Anne said. "Just send me Oranatoon."

"My dear, his name is Philip," Félicité said. "Do remember that. Oranatoon! What absurdity!"

She closed the door behind herself, and Anne discovered that she was holding her breath. What was she *doing*?

Mainly, she supposed, she was finding revenge against Henry. No man had ever hit her before, much less beaten her. Not even her father, when she was a child. She could have hit Henry back, as Félicité had suggested. She could have fought. But then he would have beaten her even more. She did not suppose she could sustain the necessary anger to carry on a fight. So instead she was taking a woman's revenge. But could it really be revenge, when it was something her husband wanted her to do? And besides, any discovery that this black man was better than Henry—he could hardly be worse!—must be kept strictly to herself. From Henry's point of view, any improvement in her responsiveness would be to his benefit; he would not question it.

So, to pretend revenge was to delude herself. A far simpler explanation for her actions was despair. As a girl she had anticipated so much from her husband—nothing less than ecstasy. And Richard Grant would have given her ecstasy. Instead, she must make do with Henry.

And because of this, she was giving up all pretense of being a moral, Christian woman, a faithful wife, or a woman fit for motherhood, and recognized herself as nothing better than an utter debauchee.

From that pit, once entered, there would be no escape. But was she not already in that pit? Richard would never return to Rio now. That seemed certain. And even if he did, she was the princess of Coimbra. There was nothing he could do for her without finding himself in jail for tampering with another man's wife.

She turned with a start as the door opened. Her knees felt weak, and touched each other as they trembled. He was such a perfect human specimen. He wore the quizzical frown that she remembered, as if he could not believe what was happening.

She forced a smile. "Do you remember me, Oranatoon?"

His face lightened, as if he were pleased to be called by his proper name. "I remember you, Highness. You own me."

"Why, so I do." She found her fingers twisting in her skirt, and looked away from him.

"There is nobody can see into here," Oranatoon said.

"No," she said. "I . . . I am glad of that."

"You want me to help you, Highness?"

Now she looked at him, in surprise.

"The mistress sometimes wishes to be undressed, Highness."

What a totally absurd conversation to be having with a man she had only met once. A slave, and a black man. Perhaps she was dreaming.

"I will undress myself," she said.

"Yes, Highness," he said, and stepped out of his clothes. He was not yet ready. She did not know whether to be relieved or insulted, and had a sudden desperate urge to engage him in conversation, to do anything . . . but that would be stupid. She was here for a purpose. She had only to remember Henry.

She unfastened the buttons of her gown. "You must think I look very strange," she said.

"Your husband did that?"

"Yes."

She watched him come closer, forced herself to slide the gown down her thighs, and felt too a sudden chill on her shoulders; she wore only a chemise over her corset and stockings. Oranatoon stood in front of her and stroked the bruised skin around her eye. His touch was the gentlest she had ever known.

"For loving another man?" he asked.

"For not loving *him*." She stood on tiptoe, put her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the mouth. She felt that if she did not do this, now, she would never be able to do anything at all. She felt his hands slip from her face, caress her shoulders, slide the chemise strap away, and then close on her breasts, still with that superb softness.

"Then he will beat you again," he said against her ear, and now she felt him harden against her. In sudden haste she reached behind herself to release the ties for the corset, then felt his hands cover hers. "I will do it," he said. "Will he not beat you again?"

"No," she said, feeling the freedom spreading through her body. "He will not know. No one will know about you and me, Oranatoon."

He was concerned when she wished to lie on her back. "I will hurt you," he said.

"You will never hurt me, Oranatoon," she said.

"But I will crush you with my weight."

"I wish to be crushed by your weight."

Suddenly she knew that for the first time since her marriage she trembled upon the brink of that ecstasy she had dreamed of. The way he touched her, the softness combined with the knowledge of what she would like, the feel and the sight of him, were all combining to drive her senses into a turmoil. Undoubtedly she was damning herself, forever. But she would be happy, at least for a season. Because here *was* ecstasy, building inside her, seeming to overflow so that it reached even her toes and her fingers, causing her to wail her hungry joy to the world, making her exert all her strength to bring him down on top of her, so that she could feel him covering the length of her. And when she could contain the ecstasy no longer, she cried out, "Richard!"

## Chapter 8

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It was a journey to the end of the world.

Richard at least had had some idea of what to expect, from the tales told him by Grandmother Kita, and Grandfather Jack, and Aunt Inez. They had traveled into the jungle, but by ship, up the broad sweep of the river itself. As for making a journey through the trackless forest, he could only draw on Grandmother Kita's tales of what her brother-in-law and lover, Jamey Grant, had told her. James Grant had wandered this forest, for more than fifteen years, seeking El Dorado, before he had at last found it—not filled with gold and precious stones, but instead with health and peace, and love and laughter.

This was Richard's goal. "My great-uncle found it," he told his men, "as did my grandmother. It is due south of us."

He did not tell them that it had taken Great-Uncle Jamey fifteen years to discover it. He did not have that much courage.

He would think, looking back, that the commencement of the march had been the worst of all. Then they had been men without a past, with a future they dared not contemplate, and a present they could hardly endure. From Dadanawan they had plunged into a morass the likes of which not one of them had ever suspected to exist. At first they thought it must be a river that had broken its banks, and sought a ford; it took them a month to realize that there was no ford, that if they would proceed they must cross it. Then for another month they had

plodded through a squelching hell in which every footstep sank them to the knees, in which the stench of rotting vegetation was always in their nostrils, in which the heat boiled the moisture around them into a white mist that often left them unable to see the sun, in which they moved in a miasma of flies and mosquitoes, which tore at all exposed flesh, and in which every carelessly flicked branch might contain a venomous snake or spider.

Here two men had died, and three horses. The latter were at least a source of meat.

The swamp had ended, remarkably, in a great river, the greatest river any of them had ever seen; they had stared at the fast-flowing water with shouts of excited joy. Richard had had to summon all his courage to tell them that this was not the Amazon. It could not be, partly because they could have covered no more than a hundred miles in the last two months, and partly because, immediately beyond the river, the land began to rise rapidly; they could even see a faraway peak that could hardly be less than six thousand feet. There was nothing like that in the vicinity of the Amazon, according to Grandmother Kita.

"But," they argued, "if this is not the Amazon, then it is certainly a tributary."

This was also clearly impossible, for the water flowed northward. But following it to its headwaters, and hoping they might be near the Amazon's, was a better prospect than scaling those distant peaks. So for a year and more they marched, south and then southeast, with the hills and mountains always on their left hand, beyond the river, and the jungle always on their right. Richard alone realized that so far they were actually fortunate, in having a river to follow, and in remaining only on the outskirts of the Matto Grosso, the great forest, except when they had to sidetrack for days along a tributary to find a place to cross.

They were all hardened campaigners, tough men to whom physical hardship and danger were nothing more than a way of life. But they were also men to whom humanity, and most of all, their own humanity, had been the ultimate achievement of God and nature. It was in the belief that they had, indeed, been created in His image, that they had found all their dignity, all their strength. None of them had ever contemplated a world in which man would be the least significant object.



Like Richard, some of them had made ocean voyages, and thus had gained some insight into this terrifying feeling of irrelevance, where man is not in his natural habitat. But a storm at sea, a shrieking wind and huge waves seeming to be playing with a ship, were totally impersonal. The sea and the wind had no enmity, made no decisions regarding the fate of the puny bits of wood and canvas that ventured into their lair. When they chose to blow and heave, it was for their own amusement; those who found themselves playing with the giants could only try to keep out of harm's way, and pray for survival.

But the forest hated. Its enmity throbbed in every leaf and every twig, swelled out of every pool of stagnant water. It was more than the creatures which lurked, apparently unsleeping and untiring in their anxiety to sting, and bite, and scratch, and suck. Alligators basking on the river bank, great anacondas, twelve and fifteen feet long, coiled around the branches where the trees overhung the water—these they could see, and frighten with pistol shots or decapitate with swift-swinging sabers. Seething ants' nests, hairy, filthy-legged tarantulas—these too could be seen, and either avoided or destroyed. The men's hate and fear centered on the unseen creatures that made life such a misery: the lice which infested their bodies; the bush ticks that lodged in armpit or behind knee, and which if carelessly removed would leave a festering sore behind; the leeches that attached themselves whenever it was necessary to wade a tributary stream; and the mosquitoes that never left them alone for an instant.

But all of these could be struck at, could be destroyed with an act of determined anger. Behind them all lay the forest. And this could not be fought. It could only be feared, as they learned to fear the torrential rainstorms, which made nonsense of their tattered clothing, pounded them with such force they were often literally driven to their knees, heads bowed beneath the thudding drops—and which were invariably followed by a sudden rise in the level of the river, to send them scrambling in search of higher ground. Or the fever, which had their teeth chattering and the flesh seeming to waste from their bones. But most of all they learned to fear the unchanging, heartbreaking monotony of day after day spent hacking their way through the same green-leafed wall, looking at the same brown water flowing past, suffering the same heat.

It must be the end of the world.

Yet they never contemplated turning back. For one thing, they had nothing to turn back for. For another, they could never have faced a return journey through the hell they had experienced during the previous months; at least, by going on, by heading south, they retained the hope that they might discover something unusual, or even encounter another human being, or at last find the mighty river they sought.

So they buried their dead, and they killed their horses and ate them, and sometimes they just rested for a day, and sat around their campfires at night and stared at each other, at the beards that hung from their chins, at the remnants of their uniforms, at their cracked boots and their rusting swords—and the next day they resumed their unceasing march.

And from time to time they even found a little beauty, more so as the ground began to rise and the trees to thin, as the river they followed began to dwindle to a stream. Now there were more docile creatures to be discovered, such as monkeys by the thousand, from the small pinched-faced sakiwinkies to the large howlers, so named because of the fearsome bellow they uttered whenever disturbed, but in fact the most harmless of animals. Then they encountered tapirs, bush cows—massive, slow-moving creatures—and their predators: the jaguars, huge cats, springing from branch to branch; and wild boar, fierce little razor-tusked beasts that roamed, and attacked, in droves, and had to be resisted with all the energy of charging cavalry—but were well worth encountering, for their flesh was the sweetest in the forest.

Here too were to be found marvelous flowers, from wild orchids of splendid mauve to huge lilies dotting the small lakes that filled every hollow, and the haunts of butterflies. Now too, for the first time they saw and heard the raucous, yellow-billed toucan, and had the pleasure of hunting pheasants of remarkably brilliant plumage.

If only they knew where they were going. For the stream did indeed dwindle, as they emerged onto a plateau, a thousand feet or more above sea level, Richard estimated, where the trees were sparse and the sun more immediate than down in the rain forest. Here they had to admit that they had been following a false scent. He refused to despair. He had no idea how long they had been on the march, but it had been a long time. The great river could not be that far away.

"We will head south," he said, "across country."

"Across these hills?" Andrew asked in dismay.

"Why not? We may see something from one of those peaks."

They killed the last of the horses and set off again, scaling the low summits to look out at more and more forest, stretching south for as far as the eye could see. Grandmother Kita had said the Indians had spoken of a *savanna*, or open country, north of the Amazon. But he could see no trace of it.

"That has to be the Amazon basin, down there," he said, with more confidence than he felt. "It is not far now."

Once again they plunged among the trees and the dead leaves, the swamps and the insects, the death and the disease. And so, after more months, they came to the river.

It had, as it invariably did about noon, just rained. For over an hour they had huddled beneath the great trees, which stretched a hundred or even two hundred feet above their heads in the search for light, deflecting but not lessening the deluge. Their original band of thirty-seven had shrunk to twenty-eight now, gaunt scarecrows of men, whose scarlet capes and blue jackets and gold braid had long ago rotted away. They wore torn shirts and breeches, clung with pitiful determination to what was left of their boots, had their pistols and cartouches tied around their waists with a variety of arrangements since their belts had fallen apart, and carried their swords in their hands. But no man had lost any of his weapons, just as none of them had lost faith in their commander.

Now he watched the water growing around their feet as the rain pounded down, and realized that it was not just accumulating, but actually seeping towards them.

"Quickly," he said, having to shout above the steady drumming of the rain. "We are close to a river. Quickly!"

Wearily they got up and retraced their steps, seeking some slightly higher ground and waiting there, patiently, for by now they knew the duration as well as the strength of these storms. And soon enough the teeming moisture stopped, and in its place the mist of white heat rose from the sodden earth, wisped along the sodden branches, and clung to the sodden bushes. Now they could go forward again, up to their knees in slow-moving brown water, could push apart the leaf screen and stare at an immense stream drifting by. It was the largest river any of them had ever seen, larger by far than the Orinoco, which they had first followed, and yet, to Richard at least, it was

disappointing. A big river, certainly, but not a moving inland sea, as described by Grandmother Kita.

Yet it had to be the Amazon. He could not admit to himself, or to his men, that they might not yet have come to their goal.

"This uncle of yours, Colonel Grant—does he live upstream or downstream?" Rorke asked with a grin. They were confident now. He had led them through the Matto Grosso, and now safety, food and drink, soft beds and smiling women were only hours away.

"He lives more than a thousand miles upriver from the coast," Jack said. "But how far we are from the coast, I have no idea."

"A thousand miles from the coast?" inquired Hall the Yorkshireman. "This river stretches a thousand miles?"

"And more. Now, lads, it seems to me that since we have arrived, we should allow ourselves a rest. We'll camp back there on the high ground. Andrew, detail a hunting party to find us some meat—monkey will have to do. Tomorrow we'll begin our search for my uncle."

They must have walked fifteen hundred miles, what with all the sidetracking and doubling back, though they had covered less than a thousand. Rarely could he see enough of the night sky to calculate their latitude, but they must be near the Equator. Rarely had they allowed themselves to rest for more than a few hours, at most a day, at a time. They had driven themselves onwards time and again, obsessed with the fear of merely dying in the forest, as had so many of their comrades. It was only now, seeing the river, having come to the end of their quest, as they thought, that they understood how exhausted they were. He smiled grimly as he leaned back against a tree and gazed at the leaf wall, listened to the crack of the pistols that told him Andrew and his band were hard at work. He had thought he was exhausted when he rode into Dadanawan, and that must have been close to two years ago. He had not known, then, what exhaustion was.

At least he had been spared the agony of having nothing to do but remember Antonia, although it had been her image that had driven him on, day after day. But to where? Was he accomplishing anything more than attempting to save the lives of his men? What *could* the future possibly hold for him? He could never find comfort in a woman's arms again. He could never risk the joy of being a father again. He did not know if

he had loved Antonia, living. She had not been beautiful, and she had not been sophisticated. Her world had begun and ended with Dadanawan. How they would have fared as a married couple he had no idea; certainly she would never have been suited to life in Rio.

But she had loved him, and trusted him, and placed all her confidence in him, and because of that love and that trust and that confidence she had been raped and killed, probably after being forced to watch her son's brains dashed against a wall.

He did not see how there could be room for any emotion but hatred in his heart for the rest of his life. He did not wish there to be. And therefore he could not really contemplate existence, after he had given his men some chance of survival. Only that remained to be done.

If only he knew how it could be accomplished, quickly. Left or right? Upstream or down? To make the wrong decision might be to involve them in another thousand-mile march. If only they had encountered some other human being. But throughout their journey they had seen no one, although from time to time they had seen signs—blazes cut into tree trunks, the remains of fires—to indicate that they were not alone in this forest, and that, indeed, their progress had from time to time been observed. But no one had attempted to interfere with the progress of this band of desperate, armed, half-naked white men, much less approach them. And until this moment he had been content that it should be so.

But now . . . now the moment was at hand. He realized that for the past several minutes he had been staring at a well-concealed face. They had, after all, arrived.

The face seemed to hang in the midst of the leaf wall, absolutely motionless, the eyes watching him. And the most incredible thing about it was that it was vaguely familiar.

He sat up very slowly, so as not to alarm this long-lost half-breed relative. "Do not move," he said quietly to the men on either side. "We are in the presence of the Indians. Do not move."

There was a rustle of alarm, and heads turned from side to side. The watcher could no longer doubt that he had been seen. Nor did he appear afraid of them. He parted the leaves and stepped through, a remarkable sight, for although he was naked, and his skin was the color of copper, he was taller and had

longer legs than any Indian Richard had ever seen; he looked more like a resident of Dadanawan than of the deep forest. But his Grant blood was even easier to determine as he approached. His arms consisted of a bow and a single arrow; these he carried at his side, and now, when standing within six feet of Richard, he stopped, and laid them on the ground.

Richard followed his example, placing his sword and pistol on the earth.

"You seek James Grant?" the Indian asked.

Another surprise. His Portuguese was good, although he pronounced each word very carefully, as if unsure of himself.

"Yes," Richard said.

"You come from the north?" He gave a half-smile as Richard frowned. "We have followed your progress for several days."

"Richard," Andrew called. "We are surrounded."

Richard watched Andrew Cullen and his party hurrying through the trees, faces pale.

"They mean us no harm," Richard said, staring into his cousin's eyes. "At least, I do not think so."

"I have no war with you," said the man. His age was difficult to judge, but Richard estimated that it could not be less than forty. Therefore . . . he found himself frowning. The only Grant of that age who could possibly be here was James Grant himself.

The Indian smiled, a mere widening of his tight lips. "We have much to discuss," he said, and uttered a peculiar, high-pitched cry. Immediately several Indians emerged from the bushes, armed with their bows. They gazed at the white men, who huddled closer together in alarm. "My people will feed you," the Indian said. "And we will talk."

Richard held out his hand. "I am Richard Grant," he said. "I am son of William Grant, and grandson of Jack Grant."

"Then your grandmother was Kita," the man said.

"Why yes," Richard said. "Did you know her?"

"And your aunt is called Inez," the man said. He squeezed the offered hand. "My name is Cal."

"Grant?"

The man hesitated, then smiled again. "Why, yes, Richard. I suppose it is Grant. But you seek your uncle, James." His mouth twisted. "Lord of this forest. Will you tell me why?"

"It is a long story."

"You will tell me as we eat," Cal said.

It was the most delicious meal any of them could remember. After so many months of half-cooked meat, here was delicious baked fish, and the soft green flesh of the avocado. The hussars fell upon it like the half-starved creatures they were, while the Indians sat around and stared at them.

And Richard told Cal of their march.

"A remarkable feat," Cal said at last. "My father accomplished something similar many years ago."

"Your father? Then you must be the first James Grant's son."

Cal nodded. "By an Indian woman."

"But . . . they have never spoken of you, in Rio."

"Why should they? Perhaps they did not know. Though I traveled with Inez and your grandfather for a year up the Amazon, I never told them. I am not important. Besides . . ." He gave a little shrug. "I am a criminal, an outlaw."

"An—" Richard looked from left to right.

"As are these who follow me."

"Then you will not guide us to my uncle?"

Cal gazed at him for some seconds. Then he shrugged. "I have nothing to offer you, Richard. Of course I shall guide you to my brother, or at least, I will show you how to go. This river we are near—the Portuguese call it the Negro."

"The Negro? But—"

"The waters are darker than those further south. Because of the mud."

"But where is the Amazon?"

"Do not make the mistake of supposing that the Amazon is just one river. It gathers several great rivers, and is itself merely the central stream, and the main one for the last thousand miles or more. The Negro flows into the Amazon some ten days by canoe below here, and another ten or fifteen days up the Amazon is your uncle's headquarters."

"That is still a long ways," Richard said. "And even longer without canoes."

Cal smiled. "We have canoes. And there is a shorter route, up a side river, then overland to another river in my brother's territory. We will even escort you a little way down that river."

"But you will not come with us to my uncle. To your brother?"

"I have said I am an outlaw, Richard. My sentence has been pronounced by James Grant himself, and for thirty years he

has hunted me. Should he ever discover me, then he would certainly command my execution."

"What, a man execute his own brother? Even a half-brother? That is impossible." Richard seized his uncle's hand. "Come with me. You have undoubtedly saved my life—all our lives. And I am Kita's grandson. I am heir to the Grant Company. I will make peace between you. I give you my word."

Cal's smile was sad. "It is not possible. Your word would mean nothing between James and me, Richard. But as I have said, my people will see you on your way. Now I suggest that you rest here for the night. Sleep well, Richard Grant. My people will stand guard."

"Why are you prepared to do so much for me and my men?" Richard asked.

"Because you are Kita's grandson. And Inez's nephew."

"And yet you can hate your own brother."

Once again the sad smile. "I do not hate James. He hates me."

"And has, for thirty years? Yours must have been a most heinous crime, Uncle."

"Yes," Cal said. "I killed our father."

"A strange man," Andrew Cullen said, ten days later, and gave a half-ashamed smile. "I will tell you this, Richard: I have never been sure how much of your claims I should believe, and how much I should consider merely as a means of encouraging us to continue through this wilderness. Do not misunderstand me. I know that you are Richard Grant of the Grant Company, however hard it is to understand that you should have given up all that wealth and comfort to fight in a remote civil war."

"And you have never inquired, for which I am grateful," Richard said.

"Nor will I. But as for your cousins in the Amazon . . . this I found difficult to believe."

"Until now," Richard said, as he watched the canoes disappearing round the bend in the river, returning upstream to where they could be safe, "I hardly believed it myself."

"A self-confessed murderer," Andrew mused, "of his own father. And yet a gentle and kindly man."

"Aye," Richard said. "By all accounts my great-uncle also had some crimes to answer for. Well, gentlemen, are you



prepared to march? For the last time?"

They were restored in health and vigor, and more important, in confidence. The ten days they had spent with the outlaws had turned them once again into men. Even their tattered uniforms, a constant cause for shame and concern, no longer seemed relevant when they had sat down with naked men. And now they knew that they had been following no dream, but a reality. El Dorado was only a few days away.

This river flowed on their left, as they marched to the south. But the next river, the Amazon itself, was also close. The entire universe seemed filled with the slow rush of the water, flowing forever toward the sea, more than a thousand miles away, Cal had said. And that he could believe; Grandmother Kita and Aunt Inez had suggested the same immensity in their tales.

But never had they mentioned *another* uncle. Apparently they had never known. Or was it because he had killed his own father? Cal had not said more about it, and Richard had not been prepared to inquire. But he thought he might find out the truth when they reached James Grant's village.

He had no idea what to expect. Grandmother Kita had always spoken of an empire, as she had spoken of the beauty and the tranquility of the country. It was difficult to consider these restless waters, with their deadly inhabitants—alligators and anacondas, piranha and stingfish—as tranquil, any more than it was possible to regard the jungle which surrounded it as peaceful. He supposed it *was* beautiful, in a wildly primitive fashion, but it was a beauty he had seen too much of during the preceding two years. Yet after meeting Cal, it was equally difficult any longer to be afraid of it, or of any other men they might meet upon this strangest of journeys. Thus when they realized that they were again surrounded by Indians, his men did no more than stop, and wait for his command.

"I am Richard Grant," he shouted, as Cal had recommended. "Look at my face, and you will know me. I have come to see my uncle, your king."

The forest seemed to grow quiet around them, and despite their new-found confidence, sweat dribbled down their cheeks. They had become aware, in only ten days with the outlaws, how useless were their swords and their pistols in this green fog. Cal and his men possessed bows and arrows for hunting, but when they went to war, they used the deadly blowpipes

that were their greatest pride; with them a puff of breath could expel a six-inch dart twelve, fifteen feet. That was a considerable distance in such thick vegetation. And the darts were impregnated with a deadly poison called *wourali*, which struck at the nervous system, paralyzing the ability to breathe, and left the victim suffocating as surely as if he had been held under water. Richard did not doubt that the men who now surrounded them, only occasionally visible as they flitted from tree to tree, were similarly armed, and could destroy his entire company in a few deadly seconds.

But once again the magic of his name was apparently sufficient. And once again, when the leaf curtain parted, he gazed at a relative. A young man not much older than himself.

"Cousin?" he asked.

"I am Zak Grant," said the young man. He had Grant features, and a powerful, athletic body, although he was not tall, and was uncharacteristically heavy through the shoulders. Like the Indians that surrounded him, he was naked. "My father is the man you seek."

"Then we are first cousins," Richard said, and held out his hand.

"And you have come to us overland?" Zak Grant asked.

Once again Richard told their story, and watched the conflicting emotions chasing each other across the young man's face. But in his own features lay the truth. However he had come, and for whatever reason, he was Grandmother Kita's grandson.

There were more canoes, and a swift voyage downriver to the Amazon, to the center of the Grant empire. It was an amazing sight to Richard, for first of all the floating wharves, and even seawalls, fronting half a mile of riverbank, built of timbers from the greenheart tree, as tough as steel and so heavy it would not float away in the high floods. Here the cleared area could not be described as less than a town, even if the houses, hardly more than four uprights across which troolie palms had been stretched as a roof, were primitive to their eyes. But there were a great number of houses, and a great number of people, and that these were hardly nomads was indicated by the stretch of cultivated fields to either side of the town, filled with corn and sweet potatoes, with yams and casavas, with okras and avocados. Only in the complete absence of domestic animals, chickens or dogs, cats or cattle, did they

differ from some prosperous Indian settlement nearer the coast.

But there was another difference, after all—in the dignity of the people. Those Indians Richard had previously met, whether in the vicinity of Rio or during his campaigns in Venezuela, had been confused and debased, their traditions eroded by the sudden impact of European culture as their minds and bodies had been devastated by the availability of European liquor, the prevalence of European diseases. Grandmother Kita, in her book, which had accompanied him on his voyage although it had been lost in the destruction of Dadanawan, had always claimed that the Indians of the interior, those as yet uncontaminated, were far superior to any human beings she had ever met; she had been thought demented for expressing that opinion. But what was he to make of the people who thronged the landings to greet the returning canoes? Perhaps they were not beautiful, to European eyes. But in their muscular development, the quickness of their black eyes, the splendid sheen of their straight black hair, the confidence of their movements, they were intensely attractive. The women wore no clothing, from the virgins with their high, pointed breasts to the grandmothers who had clearly suckled time and again. With their pouting bellies and their strange absence of pubic hair, with their smiles and their unashamed curiosity about white men's bodies and white men's weapons, they were the most exciting sight he had gazed on in a very long while. Neither he nor any of his men had known a woman in more than a year.

"Remember we come here as guests," he said. And faced his uncle.

James Grant was, Richard recalled, over fifty years old—a year older than his own father, William. But he gave little evidence of it. He was no more than medium height, in contrast to his half-brothers, William and Anthony, but was even heavier through the shoulders than his son, so that he looked almost humped-backed. For the rest, his belly was as firm and his legs as powerful as any man's half his age; his gray eyes were alert, and there was only a trace of gray in his close-cropped black hair. His features were pure Grant, which made his nudity hard to accept. But even more surprising was his complete lack of adornment. He did not even carry a stick, much less a weapon. And yet, that he was the supreme chieftain, the *cacique*, of

these people could not be doubted, in the manner in which they made way for him, and then followed him eagerly.

He was also, officially, governor of the upper Amazon, whatever his appearance or antecedents. And he seemed well enough pleased to receive his nephew.

"Richard Grant," he said. "You look just like your grandfather." He squeezed Richard's hands. "We had heard how you left Rio and went off to fight in a war. *There is a Grant*, I said. And now . . . have you lost your war?"

"For the time being, Uncle James."

"And have walked through the forest to me. A notable feat. One accomplished by my father."

"So I have been told, Uncle James. He was my inspiration."

"But he did not have so many men at his back. You must introduce me."

Richard escorted him down the line of ragged soldiers, and James Grant shook hands with every one. "And what do you seek from me?" he asked at the end.

"Well, sir, eventually, perhaps, transport to the coast."

James Grant gave a brief frown. "Eventually," he agreed. "But for the time being, food and rest. And peace. My father called this place *El Dorado*." He smiled. "It was the name given to it by my mother. Your grandmother, Richard. We called her *Kita*. She is well?"

"As well, and as beautiful, as ever."

"Does she ever speak of the Amazon?"

"Constantly."

James Grant gazed into his eyes for some seconds, then he nodded, and said, "I would have you meet my family."

There were a great number of them, for the governor apparently possessed at least six wives, all of whom were fairly old by now; their teeth had failed and their hair straggled, while their breasts and bellies had sagged. But their children, of whom he counted sixteen, were pure delights, their Indian characteristics having combined with their father's European blood to give them a straightness and a slenderness, and in the case of the women, a voluptuousness that was quite beautiful. To discover himself in the midst of so much beauty was acutely disturbing; he was relieved when the governor had completed the introductions—he could not remember half of the names, although he did understand that his uncle had used Portuguese names for all his younger children, and indeed that most of

them spoke the language—and took him off to meet the elders of the tribe.

Then it was time for the evening meal, held in the Indian style, as they sat around a huge fire and feasted off roasted fish, cassava, and yams, and boiled okra, and drank the Indian beer, made from the cassava plant and called *piwarrie*. To be seated in the cooling dusk, far removed from snake and ant bite, in the midst of plenty, surrounded by so much vivacious beauty, with one's senses slowly being turned by the heady drink, was to transform all the horrors of the past year into simple nightmares. Richard's only concern was that his men might abuse the hospitality being shown to them, as he observed that every one of his people was sitting in the midst of several Indian girls, all of whom were also consuming large quantities of the *piwarrie*.

"Put your mind at rest," James Grant said. "My people do not practice Christian laws. I will have none of my women forced, but should any of your men make a conquest, then they are welcome to enjoy it, without obligation to themselves. They will not find it difficult. My people have a great respect for a white man's height and apparent sagacity." He smiled. "Only a great chieftain's wives are reserved."

"And do the priests not object to such promiscuous relationships?" Richard asked.

"Look around you, Richard. There are no priests. And no church, either. I will not permit it."

"But . . . you are governor . . ."

"That was a title given to my father and then to me by the viceroy in Rio. Here I am king. Besides, that we remain as we are is partly their decision. Do you see those wharves over there? I built them, in anticipation of vessels making their way up the Amazon. The river is quite navigable for ocean-going ships, up to this point. I anticipated that the government in Rio would wish to open up this country, to discover its mineral resources, for undoubtedly it has those, and in far greater abundance than anywhere south of here. I was even prepared to accept a few priests, although I was resolved that they would never ruin my people as they have ruined those Indians nearer the coast." His mouth twisted. "I even thought my mother might come back, at least for a visit . . . The last of those piles was driven twenty years ago."

"It has been a difficult time," Richard suggested. "Perhaps,

now that the regent is living here. . .”

“The regent has been living here eight years and more,” James Grant said.

“There is communication, then, you and the coast.”

“Of course. Some. But slow. Hunters come up the river, and my people do some trading. There are missions further down. That is how I knew of you. That is how I know that they regard me as a savage, with naught to offer. My own family regards me as that. They wait for me to die. This land was promised to my father, you see, and to me, by your grandfather. Those were the terms of peace between them, and your grandfather had plenipotentiary powers granted him by the then viceroy. Oh, they are honest people. They will not break their treaty with me. But it is with me, not my people. Not even my son.” He gazed at Zak reflectively. “That is why, perhaps, your coming here is the best thing that has happened in years. I would have you stay awhile, Richard Grant. Study us. Understand us. In time you will be the head of the Grant Company. I would have you be my friend. My people’s friend. And my son’s.” He squeezed Richard’s hand. “Stay awhile, Richard, and enjoy a little paradise.”

## Chapter 9

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"I have never known you to smile like this," Prince Henry said. "No doubt a beating is good for a woman, from time to time. Father always claimed so."

"I think, rather, you should thank your sister," Anne said.

"Ah. So Filly has been practicing her wiles."

"She has been teaching me how to feel," Anne said. "No doubt I have waited too long."

"No doubt," Henry said. "Well, we shall retire. I would take advantage of this humor of yours. And mind that you are good, or I shall beat you again."

"I shall be good, Henry," she said. *Because it matters naught what feeble things you do to me now, she thought. There is always tomorrow. And Oranatoon.*

"Tell me of Africa," she said, lying on him, the better to feel him. "Of your life there. Of your tribe. Were you the son of a chief?" She had known him for weeks before she dared ask him that much.

"Why should you think I am the son of a chief, Highness?"

"Anne," she said. "When we are alone together, I would have you call me Anne. I think you must have royal blood, because of your intelligence, the easy way you have learned to speak Portuguese, because of your gentleness..."

"Princes are seldom very intelligent, Anne. And they are

never gentle. Is this not so with your people?"

She frowned. "Why, I suppose you are right."

"I am no prince," he said. "But I was a warrior. I have killed a tiger."

"You?"

"It is a test you must pass, to become a warrior," he said. "And I was very good. I have no scars."

"Oranatoon," she asked him another time, "did you have a family?"

"I had a family," he said.

"Are they dead?"

"I do not know. We were defeated in battle, and taken prisoner, and marched to the coast, then sold to a Portuguese trader. I do not know what became of my people." He sighed. "I shall never know. Nor they of me."

"This distresses you?"

"Yes, Highness," he said. "This distresses me."

"But you have a new family now," she said. "You have me."

"A family is with you always," he said.

"And I can come to you but three times a week." She rolled off him, sat up, and pushed the hair from her face. "Would you come to live with me?"

He frowned at her, and she bit her lip. She had spoken without thinking, uttering a dream that had haunted her these past few months that she had grown to love Oranatoon. And yet, a dream that could be made into reality, if she accepted what it would involve. She had taken this man in a spurt of angry vengeance, for all the misfortune life had inflicted on her, or perhaps that she had inflicted on herself. But it had also been in a mood of self-debasement. In a slave and a black man she would lose herself, and in time reemerge, transformed, and perhaps able to know what to do when Richard came home. It was only gradually that the certainty that Richard was never coming home had seized hold of her mind, together with another hitherto unthinkable thought, that she could love this man, a slave and a black man. That in him she could find nearly everything she had ever wanted in another human being. Or in herself.

If she dared. And it was not only daring in the physical sense. It would be the end of the Princess Anne de Coimbra.



It would even be the end of Anne de Carvalho. But it would be the emergence of a woman.

"Will that not be dangerous?" Oranatoon asked.

"You were a gift to me from Princess Félicité. No one will question that. But you will have to work. I will make you a footman so you can always be at my side. And you will be able to come to my bedchamber, during siesta. I want to have you in my own bed."

"Why?" he asked.

She turned, on her knees, to look at him.

"It will be dangerous," he said again. "It will be even more dangerous for us to live in the same house together."

"Because you will want me every time you look at me?"

"Yes. And because, as you say, you are all the family I possess now."

Was he making his way towards a declaration of love? "I shall remain your family." She stroked his brow. "If things were different, I would be your woman. Would you like that, Oranatoon?"

"I would like that, Highness," he said.

"I would like that too," she said. "We must do the best we can. I will speak to Princess Félicité, and you will come to live with me."

"It will be dangerous," he said a third time. "Especially to speak with Princess Félicité."

She smiled at him. "I cannot just take you away, Oranatoon. I must tell her what I propose. But there is no danger. She will be delighted."

*Was it, then, possible to love a black slave? Yes, because it was possible to love a man. The color of his skin, his station in life, mattered nothing, once her bedroom door closed upon them. Then she was his willing slave, or would have been, had he wished it. Instead they shared, their bodies and their growing love.*

And never a thought of Richard? But Richard was lost to her forever. Lost to her? He had never been hers. Her own weakness had seen to that. Therefore she had no past to remember, and no future to anticipate. She had only the present, with Oranatoon. A present that had lasted for weeks now, that began and ended at her bedroom door, beyond which life was mere existence. But an existence that suddenly became bearable.

"What would you do, if I had all the power in the world?" she asked.

"I would be free."

"Of me as well?"

"If you had all the power in the world, Highness, you would be able to come with me to freedom."

"To freedom." She sighed. "I do not know what that means, freedom. You are as free as I, Oranatoon. Here you will never suffer the lash. You are fed and clothed. You need have no fear of tomorrow. You are in my care, now and always. What more can you want?"

"I can want to be free," he said.

"Am I free?"

"No," he agreed. "But there are many different kinds of captivity, Highness. And to be a slave is the worst."

"You are no slave, Oranatoon," she said. "Except to my body, my love. In that sense I am equally your slave. We shall be slaves together, now and always."

"Man, you are crazy," remarked Ajax the butler. His name was not really Ajax; but Prince Henry, being one of the very few royal princes to have attended university, believed in airing his classical knowledge; Oranatoon himself had been renamed for the second time, and was now called Ulysses within the household.

"Do you know what white people does do to a slave what messes with one of their women?" Ajax continued, more in warning than anger. "And when she is the mistress and all . . ."

"Are you going to tell him?" Oranatoon asked quietly.

The old man gazed at him, watched the muscles flexing in that mighty chest. "I ain't going do that," he said. "But the master got eyes."

"He will see nothing inside this house," Oranatoon said. "And it isn't messing, old man. It is something you can't understand."

"I am understanding this," Ajax said. "She is white, and a mistress, and you is black, and a slave. Only one person can get harm from that. And it ain't going to be her. You listen to me, boy."

No doubt, Oranatoon thought, he was speaking the truth. No doubt he *was* a fool.

It did not seem important. Slavery, the result of being defeated in battle, was a possible fate for any African warrior.

It was a degree worse than being killed outright, but it was not something for a warrior to be afraid of, any more than he feared death. To be sold by his captors to white men, and then to be loaded on board a ship as if he were a sack of grain, lying alongside and beneath other sacks of grain, of both sexes and all ages, with an area hardly more than the size of his own body to call his own, for several months, had seemed another way of executing him, or of sacrificing him to whatever god these white men worshipped. He had regretted that he would die before being able to avenge himself.

Thus, like his fellow sufferers, he had been surprised and bewildered to find himself come once again to land, and a land not so very different, it seemed, from his native Congo. And it seemed he was still not immediately to be sacrificed, but rather was intended to live, so long as he obeyed his master—or in his case, his mistress—and pleased her. This had been no hardship, for he had been without a woman for too long. Yet he had hated Princess Félicité, because she possessed power of life and death over him. Because it was necessary for a slave to hate.

He had soon started to think of escape. Out there was the jungle, a jungle very like that in which he had grown to manhood. It amazed him that his fellow slaves were content to remain in their servile state, when they usually outnumbered their owners on the plantations by ten to one, and when they were not manacled all the time, as they would have been in Africa. The old hands had laughed at him. Revolt, they had said, was not practical. The white men had guns and swords and armor, and an implacable enmity towards any black man who opposed their will. As for absconding into the jungle, they assured him that it was *not* the Congo. This was a strange and forbidden land, which contained dragons and monsters unknown in Africa, and worse, savage Indians who would cut him to pieces before his very eyes. Far better to live in some security as slaves than to brave the unknown terrors of the Matto Grosso. Those slaves who *had* succeeded in making their escape had never been heard of again. And when he had pointed out that obviously, having escaped, they would not wish to be heard of again, he had been derided as a young fool who knew nothing. To enter the forest was to die.

He had still been considering this pessimistic view of his situation when the second white woman had reentered his life.

Anne. He could speak her name, at least to himself, as she liked him to speak it when she was in his arms. In the beginning she had merely been another mistress, like the other princess, and if her body had been altogether more attractive in its voluptuousness, its need, there was no reason for hating her the less.

Until she had started talking with him. For the first time since he had been taken captive, someone had actually wanted to talk with him, instead of using him or giving him an order or sharing a mutual misery. At first he had been confused, supposing it must all be leading to some other form of enslavement. Only gradually had he come to realize that this woman genuinely liked him. Even more gradually had he realized that he liked her, too. Coming to live in the prince of Coimbra's house had been like stepping out of a constant rainstorm into the shelter of a dry and pleasant cave.

It had taken him some months to realize that he was no longer thinking of escape, no longer even thinking of his misery. Days sometimes passed without his remembering the pleasures of being free, in Africa. Instead he might spend an entire day waiting for his next glimpse of her, for the moment when they could touch. But of course Ajax was right. Eventually she would tire of him, or else he would be discovered by her husband, and be executed. And if instead he managed to escape into the forest, that was simply another way to die. As he had been tempted to forget, he was a prisoner of war, and therefore a slave, and therefore doomed. But for brief moments, he was happy. Let death come when it may. For this moment, he loved.

As Oranatoon rested beside her, she thought about how much she had learned from him about her own body—things she had never suspected—which made her realize how futile had been Filly's grasping after sensation, like a blind man seeking a pin in the dark. The desire to touch and to hold, to *know*, soon became a secondary desire. Rather, she wanted to see, to hear, to share. Over the past eight months she had become a thoroughly domesticated woman, taking the greatest interest in the management of her house, of the cooking and the cleaning and the constant battle against insects, because this way she could spend all day in his company. She rarely left home, and on the evenings that Henry attended his card games—or visited his whores, for all she knew or cared—she

could summon Oranatoon to sit and talk with her.

Now she did most of the talking. Oranatoon knew of nothing beyond the forests of his African homeland, the immensity of the jungle and its dangers, the horrors of the bestial tribal wars which had occupied so much of his time; his happiest memories were of his wife and children, eking out a precarious but pleasant existence against the backdrop of bloodshed and pestilence, things he accepted as the will of God. Which god? She never pressed closely on that question. Certainly he had come into contact with the probing legions who had pushed south from the Sahara over the centuries, and who carried the Koran equally with the sword. Through these people he had a vague concept of a vast Muslim empire lying to the north of his home, an indefinable and indestructible power that was the eventual arbiter of human fate—the men who had defeated and captured him had been Arabs. When she attempted to convince him that the Ottoman empire was actually in decline, that France and Great Britain and Russia were the dominant nations now, he was clearly skeptical. Yet he could not deny the evidence of his own eyes: the fine clothes—which he considered unnecessary, as indeed they were, in Brazil—worn by the Europeans; the big houses; and more important to him than any of these things, the great cannon and muskets and swords with which they armed themselves. These he could appreciate, and these, she knew, he longed to possess for himself.

This was the sole cause she had for concern. He was a slave, subject to all the dreadful penalties the law decreed for any violation of his status. But in her company he was not a slave; he could regain the pride of his manhood, remember who and what he was. That he would one day seek to reestablish that lost glory in the rest of his life seemed too likely. She could only smother him with love, and with kindness, and with as much luxury as she dared, and beg him to wait. For what? There were dreadful thoughts roaming the recesses of her mind. Certainly not of crime. She would not have known how to begin, although this was in itself a dreadful admission—that the only reason she did not consider the murder of her husband was because of her own ignorance. But certainly Henry, in the life he lived, the vast quantities of alcohol he consumed, the loose women with whom he consorted, the endless quarrels he had with his friends, put his life at risk almost daily. She dared not allow herself to imagine what might follow his death. She only knew she waited for it.

What the other servants might think of the situation she never considered. Henry was not a farmer, so he owned only domestics, who were well treated, at least by her. That Oranatoon was better treated, that the others might even suspect, or even know, where he went and what he did during the siesta, did not concern her. Certainly for a slave to betray them could only be to the slave's disadvantage; they all must know her husband would hardly do more than beat her, after which she would still be their mistress. She had no friends to criticize her extraordinarily sequestered way of life, except Félicité. And Félicité certainly knew the reason, and often, when they met, would attempt to warn her of the dangers. But Félicité would never betray her.

As for the opinions of others, she cared nothing for those. She recognized that all her life she had been as pliable as putty. Perhaps all young girls were so obedient to convention and family law; she had drifted from girlhood straight into Félicité's sphere, and had never had a chance to think for herself. Thus when she had truly needed her strength, on that dreadful day in 1808, it had failed her. In the simple act of surrendering to her mother, she had blighted her entire life, until the coming of Oranatoon. It occurred to her that he was not merely her lover, and the only true male friend she had ever possessed, but also, in some strange way, by his ignorance of her world and thus his helplessness in it, the child she had never had either. She loved a black slave.

That it was madness occurred to her only in the small hours of the night. For if Henry did not die, then eventually they must be discovered. She understood this. But it was an understanding rather as she understood that one day *she* must die. To consider that fact daily would be to make a mockery of life. And by refusing to consider it, she could convince herself that it would never happen. Thus, she looked past Oranatoon's shoulder at the opening bedroom door without fully comprehending what was happening. The door was opening very fast, crashing back on its hinges, but it seemed to take an eternity, just as it took an eternity for her mind to accept that this should not be happening, that something was terribly wrong, that her life was entering a period of catastrophe . . . and that she was staring at Henry, with Félicité at his side, and five men at their backs.

"Bitch!" His fingers were twined in her hair, dragging her across the bed, while she remained too surprised to scream.

Dimly she realized that Oranatoon was gone, that he was fighting, somewhere in the room, but that he was helpless against so many. Dimly she felt Henry's fist crashing into her body, and dimly she realized that she was now crying out, and then when he released her she was falling, falling, until she reached the floor, a million miles away.

"No," Félicité shouted, and the boot intended for her ribs instead swung past her head. "You promised."

Anne hid her head in her arms, pressed her face into the floor, and became aware of silence. And then of pain, in her head, and in her face, and in her shoulders. And most of all in her heart.

"Get up," Félicité said. "You cannot spend the rest of your life down there."

Slowly Anne pushed herself up and gazed at her friend; the room had emptied of men. "You betrayed me," she said.

"What nonsense! I have just saved you from a dreadful beating. As for betrayal, you accomplished that yourself. Do you not suppose Henry has observed how you look at that black scoundrel? For God's sake, Anne, I never supposed you had much intelligence, but to allow yourself to become soft in the head because of a slave!"

Anne sat on the bed, and Félicité draped her dressing gown about her shoulders. "You gave him to me," she said.

"For pleasure! Not for love."

Anne seized her hand. "He must not be hurt. It isn't his fault. He didn't want to come here. He wanted to stay with you, and be visited by me. He knew it would be dangerous."

"He's intelligent," Félicité agreed. "But there's nothing to be done for him now."

Anne tossed the hair from her eyes. "You must help him," she cried.

Félicité shook her head. "I have no intention of helping him. It is impossible, anyway."

Anne bit her lip to keep back the tears. "What will happen to him?"

Félicité smiled. "He will be flogged first, I think," she said. "And then—well, the punishment for a slave who has seduced his mistress is laid down. He will be gelded, and then buried alive."

"No!" Anne screamed. "You cannot permit this."

"I? I have nothing to do with it. It is your stupidity that has

brought it about. Besides, it will be sport. I love watching them gelded. Especially the handsome ones, like Oranatoon. Sometimes they come hard at the very sight of the knife. Such sport! I'm sure Henry will let you watch too. I think he would like that."

"I am sorry, mistress," the girl said, through the panelling. "But the master has said that you must stay there. That the door must be locked."

"I am sure he did not intend that my slops should remain unemptied," Anne said, keeping her voice even with an effort.

There was a brief hesitation. Perhaps the maid would go away and ask Henry, and even return with him. But why should she? She was only dealing with her mistress, a woman well known for bending with the wind, whichever way it blew. Besides, the girl would be asking herself, what could the white woman want? She had nowhere to go.

Nowhere at all.

The key scraped in the lock. Anne picked up the already emptied china ewer, and waited.

The door opened, the girl stepped inside. "Mistress?" Her head turned, and she saw the ewer breaking on her head. The noise was tremendous, as shattered china scattered over the room. Anne caught the maid before she could hit the floor, laid her down gently, and stood there, panting, expecting footmen to come running down the corridor. Instead there was silence. It was past midnight, and as she had summoned Penelope by bell, the girl would not even be missed in the servants' quarters for some time.

She wrapped a pelisse over her nightgown, closed and locked the door behind her, and pocketed the key. She tiptoed along the corridor. Her real fear was that Henry might return early. But he normally played cards until two or three in the morning, and he had no reason to come home early.

She went down the stairs, into the dining room to arm herself with a sharp carving knife, then out one of the side doors onto the veranda, and down the steps into the garden. She had left her feet bare, and the dew dampened them even as the pebbles hurt her toes. A dog barked, then fell silent. He could tell who was an intruder, and who was not.

She crossed the lawn, passed through the wicket gate at the end, and made her way down the path by the stables and the



slave house. Here once again was danger. Henry was in many ways a surprisingly easy-going master, and the slaves were permitted a deal of freedom. Anyone might see her.

But at last she was fortunate. The path remained empty, and she could reach the triangle without mishap. She caught her breath as she saw him, even in the darkness, his back a mass of cuts, on which a swarm of flies and mosquitoes had gathered while a string had been attached to his penis and weighted with a heavy stone, which swung just clear of the ground, leaving him unable to urinate.

She stood before him, and his eyes flickered. "He will beat you," he said.

"I will recover." She cut the string and let the stone drop. Then she cut the cords holding his wrists above his head. He stood before her.

"What would you have me do?"

"Go," she said.

"Where?"

"I give you your freedom. Go into the forest. It cannot be so different from your Congo. Go, and survive, and find yourself a family, and be happy. Other slaves have escaped."

"And died in the forest."

"No," she said. "I have heard there are settlements of them. Hunters have come across them. You will find them."

His fingers closed on her arm. "Then come with me. You love me, Highness Anne. I never believed so, until this moment. But you would not risk this much if you merely enjoyed me. Come with me. If I survive, you will also survive."

She hesitated. Once again, it was a matter of strength, of making a decision. But the idea was beyond her comprehension. Grandmother Kita had survived the forest, but Grandmother Kita was unique.

She shook her head. "I would hinder you. I know nothing of the forest. Please go."

"And leave you here?"

"I will laugh at him. He cannot harm me seriously."

His turn to hesitate. She pressed the carving knife into his hand. "Go, for God's sake. Otherwise I will not be able to laugh at my husband."

"Will we meet again?"

"No," she said. "But I will remember you always."

"We will meet again," he said. "I swear it." He held her

against him, kissed her on the lips, and then released her. When she opened her eyes, he was gone.

It did not take Jack very long to realize that his uncle's invitation had been genuine, and that almost everything Grandmother Kita had put in her book was true. Certainly El Dorado was a paradise for men who had spent a year trekking through the jungle, and he suspected that it could well remain so, providing one forgot all about worldly ambitions. The Grants had not forgotten that, of course. They had made themselves the masters of the Indians as well as of the land and the river. But they also seemed to have absorbed much of the tranquility of the people they ruled.

According to Grandmother Kita, the elder James Grant had obtained his power by treachery and subterfuge, and expanded it by a series of bloody campaigns up and down the river that had reduced all the neighboring tribes to servility. That had clearly been a long time ago. The neighboring tribes certainly acknowledged the younger Grant as their *cacique*, but without rancor—indeed with both affection and respect. Nor, as Richard had observed on the first day, did his uncle often choose to remind them of his power. He wore no badge of office, held no court, led his own men hunting and fishing. And the strangers who had come to join him, he had invited to take full part in the life of the community.

To them it was paradise, a dream world. The men hunted and fished, ate a single, vast evening meal, drank a great deal of *piwarrie*, slept in the heat of the noonday sun, and fornicated as and when the mood took them. His own men easily fell into the same routine, especially since the women followed it too, with the exception that they tilled the fields rather than used the bow—although they were perfectly adept at this also—and the older of them were responsible for the innumerable children, few of whom apparently knew their parents in such a sexually promiscuous society. Within a week he and Andrew were the only two white men to retain any of their clothing, and he did so less from feelings of prudery than because he was determined not to surrender utterly to the cloying embrace of sensuality. Andrew, he suspected, was merely determined to follow his colonel in all things.

The Indians played as vigorously as they drank or loved or hunted, usually wildly energetic games, in which they armed

themselves with cut-down branches of trees, and raced about trying to hit a small object, made from the solidified sap of a tree called *caoutchouc*, and which, when it had hardened, seemed to possess qualities almost of life; if thrown to the ground it would bounce several feet high, and if hurled against a tree trunk it would return almost to the thrower. The determination with which the Indians attempted to master this ball accounted for many bruises and a great deal of amusement; it was the nearest approach to organized conflict they seemed to enjoy.

But the most remarkable aspect of their life was their remarkable health and cleanliness. Grandmother Kita, of course, had suggested in her book that the two were connected. This went against all known medical science, which held that too much bathing was harmful, yet there was no arguing with the evidence of his eyes. Such ailments as the cold were unknown in El Dorado, and even more remarkably he could discern no hint of venereal disease—so rampant on the coast, and in Portugal for that matter—despite the ceaseless sexual activity. And at least once a day every man, woman, and child in the village, including the *cacique*, trooped down to the small stream that ran past the houses to the Amazon, and there totally immersed themselves for several minutes, splashing each other and enjoying themselves like young children.

Grandmother, he thought, would be delighted with what he would have to tell her when he got home. And, much as he found to wonder at and enjoy in the life at El Dorado, from the moment he arrived there, and had recovered from the mental and physical exhaustion of walking a thousand miles through the forest, he began to think of Rio. Perhaps that was why he hesitated to go completely naked or to couple with any of the Indian girls. Or perhaps, he thought, it was some surviving spark of Scottish puritanism. More likely, he admitted, it was pride; he could not see himself entering the gates of paradise with a girl only to have to watch her, the next day, in the arms of another man. Besides, had he not now foresworn women forever?

Then, too, his instincts warned him that to take a full part in the life of this community, while it would make all other life irrelevant, would also make him unfit for any other life. He was Richard Grant. His quarrel with his family was a long time ago, and he was more than willing to forgive and forget,

and to resume his proper station, as well. He had adventured long and hard; now he wished to begin to live again.

He broached the subject to his uncle after he had been in the Indian community three weeks, but James Grant merely smiled.

"Are you not happy here, Richard?"

"Indeed I am, sir. Too happy. I cannot forget that there are things I must do with my life."

"Things that will wait, Richard," James said gently. "You are the heir to the Grant Company. Nobody can take that away from you, while you live, and you will live better here, and in more certain health than down the coast. I see you holding yourself aloof from my people. That is no way to act."

"It is the way I choose to act, sir," Richard said.

James Grant gazed at him for some seconds. Then he said, "That choice must be yours. But do not speak of leaving us until you have got to know us better. This is important to me."

"Then of course, sir, I will endeavor to do as you wish."

James Grant nodded. "I will give you a guide," he said. "I wish you to learn everything there is to know about us, our every art, our every skill. I wish you to be as one of us, so that when you return to Rio, you will carry our image ever close to your heart, and thus will not forget us."

"I have promised to do that in any event, Uncle," Richard said.

"And I believe you. Yet I wish you to learn about us. I wish you to have Elena as your guide."

The invitation was as blatant as it was unexpected. Helena was James Grant's favorite daughter, and had only just reached the age of fourteen; to this moment she had been allowed to take no part in the communal life of the village, but sat always at her father's side, or followed the women about their daily tasks.

To this youth and innocence was added a quite entrancing beauty, for she took after her Sousa e Melo ancestors in features, with a small, delicate nose and chin, to which were added the gray eyes of the Grants. It was fascinating to suppose that she looked as Grandmother Kita might have about the time of her miraculous survival of the Lisbon earthquake, which had made her the most talked-about young lady at the court of the Braganzas. But unlike her grandmother, Elena Grant was a

naked savage, and one to quicken any man's heartbeat, for to the long, slender legs and thighs she had inherited from her European forebears, as well as the wisps of body down, she also possessed the straight black hair—brushing the tops of her buttocks as she walked—and the already surging girlish breasts of her Indian ancestry.

But she was only fourteen years old. And she was his own first cousin, even if his father and James were only half-brothers. The whole idea was unthinkable.

"I am enormously flattered, sir," he said. "But I fear I must refuse."

"Why?"

"Uncle James, I am as much flesh and blood as the next man."

"Then she will be good for you," James Grant said, and beckoned. The girl left her mother and came to stand beside them.

"I cannot," Richard declared. "Why, sir..." But the very sight of her, the thought that she could be his, was summoning his dormant manhood.

"It is what I wish," James Grant said. "She is a virgin. You know this?"

Richard swallowed. "I am several times her age..."

"Hardly more than twice," James Grant said. "In Rio that would be a good match. And I do not ask so much of you."

Richard drew a long breath. "I would have it no other way, sir. I do not share my women."

James Grant stared at him for several seconds. Then he smiled. "Then you would do my family great honor, Richard. But I would force no man. I give you the girl, freely. She will share no other hammock, so long as you wish it so. But do not speak to me of marriage until you are sure, until you know that she can make you happy. Now go with her." His mouth twisted. "I would ask only that you use her gently."

Richard looked at the girl, who returned his gaze. There was no expression on her face, but as she spoke perfect Portuguese she must have understood everything that had been said. He could feel the heat in his cheeks as he stood up. This was madness. He was Richard Grant. His heart was elsewhere, and must remain there. And besides, James's plot was transparent. By whatever means he possessed, James Grant wished to secure the friendship, and the support, of his civilized cous-

ins. Even to prostituting his own daughter?

But prostitution did not enter into Indian thinking. And she was quite the loveliest creature he had ever seen. She now smiled at him.

"Elena will show you how to shoot fish," James said. "It is one of her best accomplishments."

Without a word the girl left the hut and went to the one she shared with her mothers and sisters. Richard watched her walking across the sun-baked earth of the clearing; watched, too, the heads turn as she passed other people, including his own men. They would all be aware of what was happening. That he was about to join them in their acceptance of life as it was lived in El Dorado. But could he now do anything else?

Elena Grant waited for him, carrying her bow and arrow. She was indeed an expert with it; he had seen her on many occasions, using the bow the Indian way, by lying on her back and drawing the string with feet as well as hands, to give herself greater power in shooting at birds. He had watched her, and thought how lovely she was, and then ceased to think about her, because she could never be his. Besides, he had thought of her as a child.

He realized she was standing just outside her house, waiting, without the slightest trace of impatience, but without the slightest trace of anticipation, either. Or of fear. Her father had commanded her, and she would obey him. And the longer *he* waited the more ridiculous he became.

And all of a sudden he had to have her.

He left the *cacique's* house and walked down the slope. Elena turned away from him and went toward the forest. He kept his gaze rigidly fixed in front of him—on her, in fact, on her buttocks moving against each other as she walked, on the balls of muscle rising and falling in her calf, rippling across her thighs. His throat was dry and his head seemed to be spinning. He expected to hear laughter, or at least comment, from the Indians not less than from his own men, but there was not a sound. No doubt the giving of the *cacique's* youngest daughter was a serious business.

Elena waited just inside the tree fringe, the bow and arrow trailing from her fingers. When she saw him approaching, she began to make her way into the forest, not looking over her shoulder now, disappearing altogether from time to time, parting the leaves and branches with scarcely a rustle, in contrast

to his own clumsy progress. Like all the Indians, she seemed able to navigate with the utmost certainty, while he could never venture far from the village without marking the trees to ensure his safe return. Today he was content to be guided by her.

She stopped so suddenly he nearly lurched into her back. They stood on the edge of another stream, fast-flowing and occasionally deep, but dotted with shallows.

"Here there are fish," she said. "Watch."

She stepped into the water, waded up to her thighs for a moment, and emerged onto a sand bank several feet from where he stood. Here the water just reached her ankles as she turned to face him, legs planted slightly apart, arrow placed on the bow, string already drawn; now the muscles ridged in her arms as well as her stomach, and her face was serious with concentration.

"Elena . . ."

"Sssh," she said gently, staring into the water. He waited. He could indeed have stood there for the rest of the day, just watching her. But it was only a few seconds later that she released her arrow, with a gentle *psst*, which hardly seemed to part the water but brought an immediate flurry of activity. Instantly Elena left her perch and plunged into the river, thrusting her arms beneath the surface to lift a large fish into the air, neatly transfixed by the arrow and already gasping its last.

She waded toward him. "You see? It is only necessary to stand still. Sometimes it takes a long while. But he is a good fish." She climbed out to stand beside him, water rolling down her legs, the fish at her feet. She held out the bow. "You wish to try?"

"I'm afraid I would not be any good at it," he said. But he took the weapons anyway, and laid them down. She watched him, her face as ever expressionless. Slowly he straightened. "Do you understand what your father wishes?"

"That I am to be your woman," she said.

"Aye." He bit his lip. She was not making it very easy.

"You want me now?" she asked.

"No. I mean, yes. I mean . . ."

"You do not like me," she said. Her shoulders sagged. "I am too young."

"You are . . . you are exquisite. But I cannot just take you." She stared at his breeches, his only garment.

He flushed. "What I mean is, I don't wish to. I want..." But how could a savage know anything about love?

"You wish me to stroke you," she said. "But I cannot stroke you while you cover yourself." She gave a half-smile. "Mama says you cover yourself because you have nothing. Is this true?"

"No," he said. It was incredible to hear her speaking, in her soft Portuguese, words he would not have expected from a wife of many years' standing. "I cover myself because it is the custom among my people."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because..." He shrugged. "Perhaps my people fear that we would be too lustful without clothing."

"How may a man be too lustful?" she asked, and came closer. "If you will show me how, I will uncover you."

He could think of nothing more delightful. But still he hesitated. It smacked too much of the brothel. And suddenly he knew what was lacking. What was, indeed, lacking in all Indian lovemaking that he had witnessed. "But first there is something I would do."

She waited, her eyebrows slightly arched, and he slowly reached for her, realizing that until this moment he had never even touched her. Her flesh was like velvet, and cool despite the heat of the sun. Gently he drew her toward him, and kissed her on the mouth.

Her lips remained closed, and she frowned at him in bewilderment. He moved his head. "I want to touch your tongue," he said.

Her frown deepened, but she obligingly opened her mouth and stuck out her tongue. He leaned forward again, stroked it with his own, and felt a little ripple go through her body. He held her close, to enjoy her coolness against him, to feel the little darts that were her hardened nipples against his chest.

"Do you mind me kissing you?" he asked.

"I am yours," she said.

"But do you like it?"

She gazed at him, then put out her tongue again to stroke his own.

"Now, tell me what you wish of me," he said.

Another quick frown. She was unused to being treated as an equal.

"Anything," he said.



It was the first time he had seen her look embarrassed. Seen any Indian look embarrassed, for that matter.

"You are my woman," he said. "You must tell me."

"I . . . I would uncover you," she said.

"It is called a belt," he said, and released it, then stepped out of his breeches.

She gave his erect penis only a quick glance, then continued to stare at his face. Obviously there was nothing strange about a penis to a girl who lived among naked people.

"Now *you* do not like *me*," he said.

She stretched out her hand to touch him. "It is so . . . so red," she said. "I should like to feel him inside me. Now. Will you?"

"If that is what you wish."

"I have been told it is good." She turned away from him and dropped to her hands and knees, legs spread. "I will be small, and cause you discomfort," she said. "But if I cry out, you must hit me. I have been told of this."

This had not been part of his dream. He wanted to love *his* way, at least the first time. He went to the nearest large tree and sat down with his back against the trunk. Her head turned as she watched him.

"Come to me," he said.

With another quick frown she got up and walked toward him. "Will you not enter me?" she asked.

"I will, my darling girl. But naturally." He held out his arms, and after a moment's hesitation she knelt, and came against him. He kissed her again and again, while his fingers slid over her skin, exploring and loving. Then very gently he turned her onto her back, and knelt above her. Her lips trembled as she looked up at him.

"You will hurt me," she said. "I will not cry." A tear rolled from one eye.

"I will try not to," he said, and used his lips to moisten her. Then he entered her, slowly, watched her eyes widen as her lips tightened, watched her gasp for breath, felt himself slipping, in and in and in, until he was overtaken by the wildest orgasm he had ever had, and found himself on his back, still inside her, while she lay on his chest, her midnight hair brushing his face. But the fear and the pain had gone from her face, and her teeth showed as she smiled, while she used her tongue, time and again, to kiss his eyes and his nose and his mouth and his chin.

"Will I be your woman again?" she asked.

"Aye." He held her close, just wanting to feel her against him. "You will be my woman again."

## Chapter 10

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Charles Grant walked his horse up the driveway to his house. Rather than attempt to secure a property on Beacon Hill, where he would always have been a new resident, he had preferred to build well back on Blue Hill Avenue, away from the hustle and bustle of the city itself. The sight of his house never failed to delight him. With its four stories and its great mullioned windows, and the retinue of servants coming out to greet him, it represented all that he had achieved in his nine years in Boston, not only financially—Grandpa Jack would never have given him permission to build on such a scale if the New England office had not produced enough business to make its manager economically important—but important socially as well, in his acceptance by the Boston aristocracy.

If only he could be sure that the acceptance was not mere tolerance extended him because of his wife.

He threw the reins to the first boy, glanced at the equipage waiting by the steps, and hurried into the house, frowning. Berkeley Carew! Of all the men in Boston—all the people, perhaps—he disliked Carew most. And it was not merely because the man's shipping line was the Grant Company's only possible rival for the Boston freight trade, or because *he* lived on Beacon Hill and was very definitely a Brahmin. The main reason was that he had once been a suitor of Joanna's. And to come calling. . .

Harman, the butler, waited to take his hat and stick; behind

him one of the pretty maidservants waited with a washbasin and towel; behind her a footman waited with a glass of brandy; and behind him, the bootboy waited to give his master's leather a polish before he entered the withdrawing room. This was Joanna's system. She managed her house as she managed her life, with well-ordered efficiency. And undoubtedly, he acknowledged, as he drained the goblet and felt the heat racing through his system, he owed much of his success to his wife. Not *as* as a wife, but as what she was. Joanna. Not merely Bayley Harrington's daughter, but a beauty who had never lacked admirers and suitors, of whom Carew had been merely the principal. But *he* had secured the prize. The man from Brazil. And the wedding had been celebrated little more than a year after his arrival in Boston, in June of 1809. Eyebrows had been raised, and people had wondered how he had done it. He suspected that, even after eight years, Joanna still wondered the same thing. If she obviously enjoyed having her own establishment, instead of merely being one of Edith Harrington's daughters, and certainly enjoyed being a mother, he had always had the feeling that she was not at all sure how this had come about, that she accepted rather than welcomed him to her bed, that she was waiting for some event that would convince her they really loved each other.

Men in his position, of course, did not marry for love. They married for convenience, and for children, and for advancement. Joanna Harrington left nothing to be desired in any of those directions; she had dutifully given birth to her first child, his son Bayley—named after his maternal grandfather—almost exactly ten months after their marriage, and had followed with a daughter, Edith, two years after that.

Yet, he admitted, it should be possible to love her. She remained an entrancing creature, with her masses of pale auburn hair. The fault was at least partly his. For all the brash confidence he pretended, he had approached the entire business like a small boy granted an unexpected treat, had never recovered from the humiliation of his wedding night, when he had been overcome with nervousness and had had to accept her help in fulfilling his duty, a help which had been offered, and given, in a mood of serious cooperation: I am married to this man, her demeanor had seemed to say, and thus I must do what needs to be done, for us both, regardless of my feelings in the matter.

His humiliation had been accompanied by resentment, and he remained, when in her company, humiliated and resentful. He was Charles Grant; with a history of successful amours behind him. When he remembered the way Magdalena had sighed in his arms—but had she, or any of the others, been *ladies*? And the humiliation had not been overcome in his professional life, either. Whatever he might achieve, however great his family connections, he was still the junior half of the Grant family; and besides, whatever the Grants might achieve, the Harringtons would remain the Harringtons, and this was Harrington country.

But for Joanna to entertain a man like Berkeley Carew in her own house, and in her husband's absence, was surely going too far. What would she say if *he* brought home one of his lady friends?

Yet he had to appear as insouciantly confident as ever. The double doors were opened for him, and he entered the room, thumbs tucked into his vest, to smile at them, while his mind seethed angrily: they did not appear the least disconcerted to see him, and turned toward him with polite interest.

"Grant!" Carew stood up and held out his hand. He was not so tall as Charles, but was very solidly built, with a heavy moustache. And he might have been welcoming his hostess's husband into *his* house.

Charles shook hands.

"I dropped by to tell Joanna that my mother is happily well again."

"Has she been ill?" Charles inquired.

"Charles!" Joanna said. "I told you about Mrs. Carew's illness."

"No doubt you did," Charles agreed. He really did not have the time to listen to all of Joanna's gossip about her Beacon Hill friends—they all seemed one vast family to whom he was quite irrelevant. "Well, I'm glad the old lady is on her feet again, Carew. No doubt you have other people to whom you wish to impart the good news."

"I thought Berkeley might stay to supper," Joanna said.

"I think I *should* be getting along," Carew said, glancing from husband to wife. "As Charles says, I have other stops to make." He bent over Joanna's hand and raised it to his lips. "Seeing you again has quite made my day." He went outside, followed by Charles.

"I should be grateful, in the future, if you'd time your calls for when I happen to be at home," Charles said.

Carew raised his eyebrows. "Joanna is an old friend. I've known her since childhood."

"She also happens to be my wife," Charles said.

"Yes," Carew said. "I wonder if that is *why* Bayley Harrington asked me to call, whenever I had the opportunity? I'll let myself out."

The door closed, and Charles stared after him in angry consternation. Had Joanna been babbling to her father that all was not well in the marriage? By God, he thought . . . but he could not help but be aware that his entire position, social as well as in the business community, depended on the backing of Bayley Harrington.

He returned to the drawing room. Joanna was standing by the window to wave goodbye to her friend. "That was uncommonly rude," she remarked, "even for you."

He glared at her back. "Do you suppose I enjoy coming home to find my wife's lover in residence?"

She turned, her face icy. "What did you say?"

He flushed. "Well . . . you know what I mean."

"I know what you suggested," she said. She crossed the room, picked up her reticule, and went to the door.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"I have a headache," she said. "I think I will take supper in my room. And Charles, I would prefer to sleep alone tonight. Would you mind using the spare room?" She swept through the doorway without looking at him.

"Close the door," Charles Grant commanded.

The original small office in which he had first set up the Grant Company business in Boston had now been expanded to an entire floor, where clerks busied themselves at large desks, carefully copying bills of lading and invoices, entering them in huge ledgers, adding endless columns of figures. As Charles discouraged conversation during working hours, the only sounds normally to be heard in the vast room were the scrapings of pens, and an occasional cough. And Cheyney had a penetrating voice.

But once inside the privacy of his office, there was no risk of their being overheard. "Well?"

Cheyney, as usual, looked distinctly like a ferret. "Well,

sir, Mr. Charles," he said. "The figures aren't so very good, from our point of view. The last Lodge shipment, the one you was wondering about, went on a Carew ship."

"Why, for God's sake?" Charles demanded. "We delivered on schedule."

"Indeed we did, sir. But . . . well, they do say blood is thicker than water. Seems that just before Mr. Lodge decided to change to Carew, Mr. Carew had him out to dinner."

Charles gazed at him. "They're not related, are they?"

"They might as well be, sir. Both their ancestors were Pilgrim fathers."

Charles's hands curled into fists. Those damned Brahmins again, sticking together. But perhaps it had been inspired by Harrington. Well, there was nothing he could do about his father-in-law, at the moment. But Carew . . . he thought he only hated one man in the world more than Berkeley Carew, and that was his cousin Richard.

But how the devil could he settle with him, either, when the man had the protection of the Beacon Hill crowd?

"So you've found out nothing of any value whatsoever," he remarked. "Except that Carew is poaching my business. Which I can tell for myself by a glance at the books."

"Ah, well, sir. . . ." Cheyney sat down, unasked, as he invariably did when about to prove his value to his master. "There is something."

Charles gazed at him.

"There is evidence, sir, of . . . shall we say, a financial stringency in the Carew operations?"

Charles waited.

"It is well known," Cheyney went on, "that he pays his crews less than you do, and keeps them down to a minimum, too."

"So he's determined to make a profit," Charles said. He was often tempted to do the same, but of course Uncle William and Grandfather Jack would never stand for it. Anyway, he wasn't interested in straightforward competition. He wanted to grind Carew into the dust. To watch him dwindle away into nothing. To . . .

"He has also, sir, recently sold his second team of horses," Cheyney said.

Charles's head came up, as he frowned. "The devil he has." He chewed his lip. "But if he's truly short, Cheyney, all he has to do is go to his friends."

"Well, sir, I don't know about that. These people have a peculiar code. They'll *help* a man all they can, if he's one of theirs, but lend him *money* . . . that's for businessmen, not friends. Anyway, my information is that he would require a tidy sum to see him through."

Charles stroked his chin. "He is being dunned?"

Cheyney shook his head. "No one in Boston is going to dun Mr. Berkeley Carew, Mr. Charles. That is part of the code. But it's tight, there's no question of that. Now, sir, two of his ships are fifteen years old or more. When they have to be replaced, I'd say he could be in real difficulties."

"And when will they have to be replaced?" Charles inquired.

"Well, sir, in not more than five years, I'd say."

"Five years?" Charles cried. "For God's sake, you numbskull, do you think I'm prepared to wait five years? And five years during which he will be steadily stealing my business? In five years I'll be the one in difficulties, at this rate." Angriily he got up from his desk, walked to the window, looked down on the street and the distant harbor. "And you call that financial difficulties? Because a man sells a team of horses and underpays his crews? Cheyney, you're a fool. He's probably as solvent as I am."

"Ah, well, sir," Cheyney said, not at all abashed by the tongue-lashing. "He's cutting things pretty fine, on my information. Did you know, sir, that he sent his last ship to sea uninsured? Hull and cargo? Now then, sir, how many people do you suppose know that?"

Slowly Charles turned back from his window. "Berkeley Carew sent a ship across the ocean uninsured? You *know* this?"

"Well, sir, it's what I was told."

"Who by?"

"Well, sir, the mate. He only found out about it because the master got drunk one night and let it out. Pretty unhappy he was about the situation, too."

"By God," Charles said, a slow smile spreading over his face. "By God, the fool! If he were to lose a ship, uninsured, with cargo claims on top of crew claims, and the scandal . . . it would break him. By God, it would break him."

"Why, yes, sir, Mr. Charles, I imagine it would," Cheyney agreed. "But Berkeley Carew has never lost a ship in his life. He may not pay his crews well, and he may keep them short-handed, but those ships are tight, sir. Oh, yes, he takes care of them."



Charles stared at him, and the little man frowned, and then seemed to pale a shade, as he drew a long breath.

"But of course, accidents do happen."

"Yes," Charles Grant said. "What was this mate's name? The one who was unhappy?"

The tavern was smoky and dingy. It was situated on one of the side alleys off the waterfront, and seemed, at a glance, to be the haunt of every unsavory character in Massachusetts. Charles decided, having pushed two of the girls away from him with some force, that if he ever did get fed up with waiting for Joanna to come to life in his arms, he could at least discover a good actress here, without the slightest difficulty.

"Over here, sir," Cheyney said. Cheyney had chosen the spot, and Charles was very glad to have the little man along. Alone, he'd expect to have his pocket picked or his purse slit in seconds. He followed the clerk through the smoke to a table in the very corner of the room, where a man sat alone. The seaman was short and heavily built, clean-shaven but with rather long hair. Wearing a pea-jacket and a peaked cap, he was far better dressed than the average customer.

Cheyney stood by the table. "This is my principal," he said.

The mate nodded; he did not get up. "I know Mr. Grant," he said.

"You'll forget he was here," Cheyney said.

The mate looked Charles up and down. "I have a short memory," he said, "when the price is right."

Charles took the chair next to his, with his back against the wall. "I'm here to talk about prices, Mr. Lobo."

Lobo gazed into his half-empty glass.

"Three rums, Cheyney," Charles said.

"I drink whiskey, Mr. Grant," Lobo said. "When I'm not paying."

Charles shrugged. "Three whiskeys, Cheyney."

Cheyney hesitated. But the matter was out of his hands now. He went to the bar.

"Where'd you find that creepy little man?" Lobo inquired.

"He's useful," Charles said. "Creepy little men often are. Are you useful, Lobo?"

The mate's head came up, uncertain how to take the question.

Charles smiled at him. "I'm here to do you a favor. I'm

told you're underpaid and overworked. That you have a drunken skipper. And that you go to sea uninsured."

Lobo stared at him, then slowly turned his head to watch Cheyney returning toward them, carrying three glasses and a bottle of whiskey.

"As I said, he's useful," Charles pointed out. He waited for Cheyney to pour, then raised his glass. "Your good health, Mr. Lobo."

Lobo drank. "You offering me a job?"

"I would," Charles said, "if you'd prove to me you're worth it. My ships work hard, Lobo. I drive them hard. I maintain schedules. I expect my officers to lead."

"Carew maintains schedules, too," Lobo observed.

"But I pay better," Charles said. "And the Grant Company is a bigger concern. What you see out of Boston is only a fraction of our ships. A man could go far in the Grant Company."

Lobo gazed at him, and drank some more whiskey.

"But he would have to prove that only the company mattered. That is our motto at Grant's. Only the company matters. There is no man in my employ who would not be prepared to die for the company." He gazed at Cheyney, who hastily drank some whiskey himself. "I would be prepared to die for it myself. Would you be prepared to die for it, Lobo?"

"If the price was right," Lobo said. "And if I knew my wife and kids would be looked after."

"You may rely on that," Charles said.

"Then I'm your man."

Charles raised his forefinger. "Not so fast. I talked about proving you're my man."

"Tell me how."

"Well, as I was saying," Charles said, "only the company matters. Whoever is for the company is a friend. Whoever is against the company is an enemy. That make sense to you?"

Lobo waited.

"So right now, you're an enemy, Lobo, because you can't be more against the company than by working for Carew."

"So I've just quit."

Charles shook his head. "That's not good enough. I don't want you to quit right now. I want you to help the company first."

Lobo began to frown. "How, exactly?"

Charles drew a long breath. "By putting the *Niobe* on the rocks."

Lobo stared at him. "You're crazy."

It was Charles's turn to wait.

"That's barratry," Lobo said. "I'd get ten years, and lose my ticket."

"If it could be proved," Charles said.

"Hell," Lobo said, "there's the skipper."

"Who's often drunk. Suppose you were to help him get drunk one night."

"Approaching land? He's not that daft."

"He might be, with a little encouragement. You could get drunk together, Lobo, and in your drunken state, you could make a mistake, put her on the rocks. That way no one would ever be sure *who* was responsible."

"And that way we'd both lose our tickets. We'd be black-balled out of Boston, Mr. Grant."

"Should that bother you, Lobo? You could serve the rest of your life as master of a Grant ship, and never see Boston again. We sail under the Portuguese flag. We don't have to take heed of American laws."

"I couldn't do it, Mr. Grant," Lobo muttered. "Sink my own ship? What about the danger?"

"Choose a calm night. I'm not expecting you to do it on your next voyage, Lobo. Just sometime soon. Pick your time." He felt in his pocket and took out a brown-paper parcel. "If you agree, you'll be on my retainer from now."

Lobo eyed the parcel. He could tell from its shape that it contained dollar bills; even if they were ones they added up to a lot of money.

Charles could read his mind. "They're tens," he said. "One hundred of them. And there'll be four more packets like this, once the job is done." He smiled. "Together with a first mate's berth on a Grant ship, with a master's berth to follow. Your wife will like Rio."

Lobo licked his lips. "How do I know I can trust you?" he said, half to himself.

"I'm a man of my word," Charles said. "Ask Cheyney."

"Oh, Mr. Grant is a man of his word," Cheyney said.

"And I treat my people right," Charles said. "Those that work for *me*." He pushed the packet across the table. "That's yours. Look inside. But I wouldn't open it in this company."

Lobo looked left and right, and cautiously peered into the parcel.

"The question surely is," Charles remarked gently, "how do I know *I* can trust *you*?"

Lobo raised his head, while his hand slid the packet into his coat pocket. "I've taken your money, Mr. Grant. I'm working for the Grant Company now."

Charles nodded. "You'd best remember that, Lobo. I'm not a man to be crossed. Eh, Cheyney?"

"Indeed, Mr. Grant," Cheyney said. "You're not a man to be crossed."

"So if, for instance," Charles said, "our meeting here ever came to court, it would be Cheyney's and my words against yours. Remember that. And do as I ask. Succeed for me, Lobo, and you'll wind up commodore of the Grant fleet. Fail for me, or let me down, and so help me God your wife will wind up a widow, begging on the streets."

Lobo stared at Charles for several seconds and licked his lips. "I can't promise it'll be the next voyage, Mr. Grant," he said. "Like you said, I must choose my time." He forced a smile. "There's no point in working for you if I get killed first time around."

"No point at all," Charles said easily. "Take your time, Lobo. There's often mist and a calm sea out there in the autumn. That's the time to do it. You'd only have a short row to the harbor, and any man can hit a rock in fog. Choose your time." He got up. "I'll give you a year. Then I'll want my money back." He leaned over the table, resting on his hands. "And remember Lobo, if you get careless, nobody can harm *me*. I can be on a ship back to Brazil within hours, beyond the reach of United States law. But you can't, unless you come with me. Remember that."

"A season," Andrew Cullen said. "You spoke of staying a season."

Richard stretched out his legs and inhaled the scented smoke from the rolled leaf he held between his teeth; tobacco grew wild in the forest and was a great delight to the Indians. "A season can be many things, Andrew."

"A lifetime, in fact."

Richard smiled lazily and watched Elena walk toward him. He did little more than watch her, all day, as he felt her against him, all night. Even when he was hunting with the other men,

he carried her image before him. It was a sheer delight to watch her grow, and in the past year and a half she had grown very quickly; she had gained several inches in height, her breasts had become rounded, her pubic hair had bushed.

"It won't be much longer now," he said. "When she is older."

Andrew frowned at him. "You will take her with you?"

"She is my wife."

"Not in a church, Richard."

"Before God. Which is more binding than any church."

"You will take her to Rio, to be the wife of the head of the Grant Company?"

"Yes."

Andrew pulled at his nose.

And Richard smiled. "Of course there will be those who will look askance at her Indian blood. But I do not give a damn for their opinions."

"I was thinking of your own people. From what you have told me, from what your uncle has said, his branch of the family is ill regarded by yours."

"For crimes rather than miscegenation. But even their crimes are forgiven by me. And by my grandfather and grandmother. They are the important ones. Grandmother Kita will adore Elena. I give you my word it will be soon. And you make life unnecessarily hard for yourself. Why don't you follow my example?"

"A mud hut on the banks of the Amazon is not for me," Cullen said, "but who knows? If one of these women pleased me enough, I might forget there is more to life than this." He looked around him. "You will never shift any of those fellows."

The rest of the regiment had truly settled into the community, and were as content as any of the Indians.

"I would not wish to," he said. "I am only glad that I have succeeded in bringing them to this happiness. But as you say, I have things to do with my life. And you with yours. We will leave soon. I will know when."

But he sometimes wondered if he would know when. He told himself that it would be best to wait until Elena was a little older, and also until James Grant might grow more accustomed to the idea of her leaving the community; it was not a matter they had yet discussed. More likely, he was waiting until he grew bored. But perhaps he would never become bored. Undoubtedly Andrew was right. He was grievously neglecting

his responsibilities—both to Bolívar, supposing that romantic dreamer would ever again set foot on Venezuelan soil, and to his family, in not informing them that he was alive and well. But he had especially asked his uncle to conceal his presence. If his parents knew he was back in Brazil, they would send for him, and that was the last thing he wanted.

And so he lay beneath his tree and smoked tobacco, or went hunting with the other men, or fishing with Elena, or walked with her in the forest and talked to her of life in Rio, or lay with her in his hammock, her cool wonderland of flesh surging against his own overheated desires, or sat at the evening feast with his uncle and his cousins, or watched the stars wheeling slowly through the heavens, or received messengers from the tribes further down the river, bringing news from Rio and the world at large. But it took a year or more for news to filter this far. The regent's war against Buenos Aires continued with little success, merely draining money from the Brazilian economy—another reason for not returning to Rio. He could hardly see himself able to support such a government.

Better to wait, to hunt, and fish, and love. He lounged, listening to the whistles of the Indians returning from a larger-than-usual hunting expedition. But Richard sat up in dismay as he saw them disembarking from their canoes and forcing a captive toward the village, while their women and children gathered round to applaud.

"You did not know you possessed another uncle," James Grant said. "Meet my brother, Cal."

Cal Grant's wrists had been bound tightly together behind his back; and there were bruises on his chest and shoulders. But he carried his head erect, gazed at his half-brother without fear, and at Richard with no sign of recognition.

"No," Richard said. "I did not know."

"He is an outlaw and a murderer," James Grant said, "for whom I have hunted for more than thirty years. But as they say, all things come to he who waits. For thirty years, Cal, my father has cried out for your blood."

"As for thirty years my mother has rested easy in her grave, because her death was finally avenged," Cal said.

James Grant looked into his eyes. "I never knew your mother."

"She saved our father's life, James," Cal said. "And he abandoned her, to die in lonely misery."

"I never knew your mother," James said again. "And I am

sworn to avenge my father's death. Prepare him," he said to the warriors, who gave a great shout, which was taken up by the women as Cal was led away.

"You cannot mean to execute him," Richard said. "He is your brother!"

"He is my father's son," James said. "That is not the same thing. There are many things you do not understand, Richard. But you must know that a man must avenge his dead, and that justice must be done."

"From all accounts, your father may also have had a crime to answer for," Richard said.

"He was my father," James said. "And he was *cacique* of this tribe. Therefore he has no crime to answer for."

"You are governor of the Upper Amazon," Richard insisted. "You must rule according to Portuguese law, not arbitrary methods of Indian justice."

"Richard." Andrew Cullen seized his arm, "Do you know what they are going to do? My God, you must stop this."

Cal Grant was lost to sight in the midst of the huge crowd of Indians gathered in the center of the village.

"Richard..." Andrew's voice was thick. Richard hurried down the slope, parted the people, and gazed at Cal. He had been stretched across the branch of a tree, itself set in two other forked branches to make a trestle. His wrists and ankles were held to the ground by eager young men, while the women and girls coated his buttocks and genitals with honey, stroking him with loving care as they shouted their laughter.

"What obscenity is this?" Richard tried to reach the man, and found his arm gripped by Elena.

"It is necessary," she said.

He stared at her. "You have seen this happen before?"

"Enough," James Grant commanded, and Cal was jerked upright again. For a moment he gazed into his half-brother's eyes, then Cal was marched across the village, away from the houses and the stream, to where several of the men were busy clearing a small piece of land. Here four stakes had been driven into the ground. Cal was laid on his back between them, and his wrists and ankles secured, so that he was spread-eagled, gazing at the sky, and at the Indians, who now withdrew to form a great circle around the helpless man.

"My God," Richard said. "You cannot just leave him."

For already insects were swarming out of the trees to alight on the honey, to bite and sting at the flesh. Cal never moved.

"It will not take long," James Grant said. "Although it will seem forever to him. You will hear him scream."

Richard stared at him, and then at Cal, and then at the thin stream of ants issuing from the bushes.

"They will enter his body by the anus," James Grant said, "in search of more honey. They will eat his bowels. He *will* scream."

Richard's jaw sagged in horror, and he looked down at Elena. But like everyone else, she was watching the condemned man. And now at last Cal moved, a faint shudder creeping up his body. The watching Indians gave a shriek of delight. Elena glanced at Richard, her eyes sad as she realized his disapproval. It was then he noticed that she was carrying her bow; she had been fishing.

He took it from her fingers, the arrow from her other hand. She stared at him in alarm, shook her head, and reached for them. He shrugged her off and drew the string, while James Grant suddenly realized what he was doing and turned with an exclamation of anger. But Richard had by now become as expert with a bow as with a pistol. He sidestepped, sighted, and loosed the shaft. The barb sank into Cal Grant's neck with frightful force, slashing through jugular and vertebra to leave him dead.

Richard was surrounded by Indians, whipping the bow from his hands, seizing him, marching him back to the village, while Elena tugged and pulled at them to try and free him.

"Stop," James Grant shouted, and Richard was brought to a halt. He saw that Andrew Cullen was hastily marshaling the regiment, and passing out swords and pistols. But there were less than thirty of them against several hundred Indians.

"That death is the custom of our people, for great criminals," James Grant said. "Tell me why I should not stake you out in his place."

Richard refused to lower his eyes. "Because the Grant Company would destroy you," he said.

The two men stared at each other.

"I have committed a crime," Richard said. "I will leave your village, Uncle James."

"And your men?"

"That is up to them. I think most of them will stay. But I will take Elena with me."

James Grant looked at his daughter. "You will not force her."




"I will go with Richard, Father," she said. "I am his woman."

"I gave you my word," Richard said, "that we would remain friends. I am not sorry for what I did. But I respect your customs. Perhaps I will return again one day. And you are welcome in Rio, Uncle James. But this life is not for me."

James Grant gazed at him for several seconds longer. Then he nodded. "I had planned much for you," he said. "Perhaps . . ." He looked past Richard at the waiting Indians, at his son Zak, standing in front of them. "Heredity is not always the ideal course to follow. I had thought perhaps I had found a true successor, one able to defend my people against the encroachments of the whites. But it is best you go, for now. You are still a young man. You will come back. And be welcome." He smiled. "Discover once again, Richard, how little civilization has to offer, compared with El Dorado. And then come back. I ask only that you care for my daughter."



## PART THREE



## Chapter 11

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William Grant rose slowly from behind his desk. He could not believe what he was seeing.

"Richard?" he whispered. "Richard?"

The man was no taller than he remembered, but his shoulders were broader, and his entire frame had filled out. There was no uncertainty in his eyes, only decision in the firmness of his mouth, the strength in his jaw. And above all else, where William remembered a boy, no one could doubt that this was a man.

"Richard," he said, and held him close.

Richard kissed his father's cheeks, sadly aware of the passage of time. William Grant's hair was white, and his cheeks were sunken even as his shoulders were bowed.

"I have caused you too much grief," he said.

"Grief?" William smiled. "Aye, you have caused me grief, but to have you back now, at this moment . . . why, it is like a miracle."

Richard frowned at him. "Is there some crisis?" He looked past his father, through the open window at the bustling docks. "But I have never seen such prosperity. So many elegant buildings."

William Grant left an arm round his son's shoulders, as he pointed with the other. "You'll have seen the new Customs House. Over there is the Institute of Fine Arts. Behind it you'll see the National Museum. And down there on the left—that is our theater, the Lyric. Oh, aye, they are fine buildings. King

John wants Rio to be the finest city in the Western Hemisphere." He sighed. "But we have paid for them with our taxes."

"King John? The queen is dead then?"

"Indeed. We are still officially in mourning."

"And how will that change things?"

"Hardly for the better. His Majesty now agitates for his recall to Portugal. I think they are happier to see him remain here. There is a great deal of bickering, about constitutions and the like. You have come back to no happy country, Richard."

"Save for the Grant Company," Richard said. "I saw three vessels unloading in the port. They look as trim as ever. I will confess that when I saw their flags at half-mast, I was frightened. But if it is for the queen—"

"Not just the queen, Richard."

Richard clutched his father's arm. "Then who?"

"Father died two months ago?"

"Grandfather Jack? My God. But . . . poor Grandmother Kita. I must go to her."

"Mother died nearly three years ago, Richard. I do not think Father really wished to continue living after that. Now they are together, and no doubt happy. But the rest of us . . ."

Richard slowly lowered himself into a chair. "I have been away too long," he said.

"And you have adventured, and even prospered. I can see it in your face. Believe me, Richard, your return will make up for many ills. Anthony and I have been much concerned about the company."

Richard looked up. "Is Charles back?"

William shook his head. "We have debated that very point. But Father, in his will, stipulated that you were the heir until there was certain news of your death. Charles is doing well. The American business is prospering and he is married to a Harrington—there is no better family in all Massachusetts—and has two children. We may suppose he has settled down and will be worthy of the name he bears. But you are the heir, Richard. Thank God you are back, boy. Thank God."

"Aye," Richard said. "Thank God. Mother!" He got up. "I have not asked about Mother."

"She is well. Aged, you understand, Richard. Aged. You have been away ten years."

"Ten years," Richard said, and embraced his father again. "Well, I am back now, never to roam again. I promise you that. I am here to be a Grant, to help you and Uncle Anthony." He smiled. "And more than that, Father. I bring with me a friend, sworn to devote his life to our enterprise, and a wife. Well, we have not yet been married in a church, but that is something I have sworn to accomplish here in Rio, before all the world. She is already my wife in all things."

"A wife? Oh, Richard, how splendid. Is she beautiful?"

"The most beautiful girl in all the world, Father. I want you to meet her. She is waiting outside in the carriage. She would not come in, to intrude upon our reunion."

"A wife," William said, hurrying through the office, brushing aside the clerks crowding forward to shake Richard's hands. "Your mother will be so pleased. Ah, Richard, if you knew how happy I am at this moment. Why, I feel I could burst. I..." He opened the front door, and stared at the girl sitting next to Andrew Cullen in the carriage.

Richard held Elena's arm to escort her up the stairs. She remained uncomfortable in her gown and chemise, her stockings and her shoes, bought for her in Belém, just as she was unused to wearing her straw hat; she had refused to dress her hair, and it flowed out from beneath the brim rather as if she were a small girl. As in many ways she was; she was not yet sixteen years old.

Like Richard, she had anticipated no crisis. Yet it was already at hand. William had surmounted his initial confusion at recognizing her Indian blood. He had chattered on the way out to Copacabana, pointing out the other new buildings that had sprung up over the past years, the way Rio itself had spread, the newly paved roads—and all the while his growing agitation had become more and more apparent. He had sent a messenger ahead by fast pony to warn the family, and now the moment was at hand. Célestine, together with Aunt Inez and Uncle Anthony, were gathered on the porch to greet them.

"Mother!" Richard held her in his arms, kissed both cheeks, and pressed her close.

"To have you back, Richard. To have you back." Célestine's fingers were tight on his arms. But she was looking past him. "And this is ...?"

"Elena, Mother. Elena Grant."

"James's child," Inez said. "I would have recognized her anywhere."

"Give me a kiss, child," Célestine said, and held out her arms. Elena glanced at Richard before stepping forward.

"You are lovely," Inez said, and Richard's aunt smiled warmly. "Quite lovely." Her hair was streaked with gray, where Richard remembered only the rich auburn. But she had grieved at her own mother's death; Christina had been her daughter's friend.

"And so welcome," Célestine said, her voice flat. "We have so wished for news of your father, and your brothers and sisters. We shall have a great deal to talk about. But now I know you must be tired after your journeying, and you will wish to change your clothes. Inez, would you be good enough to show Elena to her room?"

"Of course, Célestine," Inez said. "Will you come with me, Elena?"

Elena again glanced at Richard, who nodded. She smiled at Célestine, and followed Inez into the house.

"And this is Andrew Cullen, my closest friend," Richard said. "We campaigned together. I hope you will welcome him as a second son."

"Indeed we shall," Célestine said, welcoming Andrew with much more sincerity than she had shown to Elena. "Anthony, would you be so kind as to see to Mr. Cullen's bedchamber? We have so much to discuss with Richard. So much.

"She is a sweet child," she said, half to herself, and linked her arm through her son's. "And as Inez says, very beautiful. You must tell me all about her." She led him into the downstairs hall. "You must tell me all about everything you have done . . . oh, Richard . . ." Her voice cracked and tears suddenly flowed from her eyes. "To be away for so long, with never a letter, never a word of whether you were alive or dead . . ."

"I did write, Mother," Richard said. "I wrote from Jamaica, and then I wrote from Venezuela."

"And then disappeared," she said, mounting the stairs beside him, followed by her husband. "Into the forest, it was said."

"It is not easy to mail letters from the forest, Mother," Richard said, smiling. "I am sorry for staying away so long. I am even more sorry that I was not here to see Grandfather Jack and Grandmother Kita again. But I think what I did had to be. I think I am better for it."

"And now you are back," she said. "Nothing else matters.

This will be your room." She opened the door and showed him into the huge bedchamber.

"But . . . this was Grandmother Kita's room."

"And thus we have kept it for you, for we knew how much you loved her. And she you."

He walked to the window and looked out to the beach. "It is the loveliest room in the house."

"All the rooms in this house are lovely, Richard. But you will be happy here."

"Oh, I shall. And so will Elena. I must show it to her. Where will Aunt Inez have taken her, do you think?"

"Why, to *her* bedchamber," Célestine said, clasping her hands in front of herself as she always did when she was preparing to insist on her own way.

"This is her bedchamber, Mother." Richard faced her, well aware that everything that had been said so far had been only sparring. "She is my wife."

"Now, Richard," William said. "You told me it had not been consecrated in a church."

"There are not many churches up the Amazon, Father," Richard said. "But Elena is my wife, and has been so for nearly two years. I could have married her in Belém, before taking ship for Rio, but I preferred not to. I will marry her here, before the whole family."

"Nearly two years?" Célestine asked. "But . . . she hardly looks sixteen, now."

"She will be sixteen in less than a month, Mother. She was fourteen when I married her."

"Fourteen? My God." She looked at her husband.

"Well . . . it is not so young, in the Amazon," William said. "But Richard, now you are in Rio, the capital of Brazil. More than that, the capital of the kingdom . . ."

"And you are the heir to the Grant Company," Célestine said. "And this girl is a first cousin, which is within the bounds of consanguinity . . ."

"She is not precisely a first cousin, Mother," Richard said. "We share the same grandmother. But James Grant is only your half-brother, Father. That must make a difference."

"As his father was my father's brother, I doubt it will, in the eyes of the Church," William Grant said. "We shall have to seek advice, but I do not think the bishop will care for this match."

"Then we shall have to continue as we are," Richard said.

"Elena is my wife, and will remain so."

"For heaven's sake, Richard," Célestine cried, at last losing her temper. "She is naught but a savage. Her mother was a savage. And so is her father, if he is James Grant. A naked savage. Not even a Christian. How can you *consider* such a step?"

Richard answered her quietly, "Elena is prepared to be baptized, Mother. It is from lack of opportunity rather than from choice that she is not yet a Christian. She wishes to be everything I wish her to be. No man could ask anything more from a wife."

"Except that she cannot *be* your wife," Célestine said, "as your father has just explained. Oh, God in heaven, how did I manage to give birth to such a wayward son! Richard, you cannot marry this girl. The Church will not permit it. And you are the Grant heir. You must marry, and you must have children, to carry on the name and the company. They must be legitimate children. And *white* children."

"Ah," Richard said. "There is the truth at last. Your objections to Elena are based upon her Indian blood."

"I am sure that is not true," William said, but he flushed as he spoke.

"I do not think we should prevaricate," Célestine said. "It is true I do not wish mestizo grandchildren. Even if they could be legitimate, I would not want them. They would mean the end of the Grant Company, the Grant family, as we know it and wish it to be. But since, in addition, they cannot even be legitimate, then I must absolutely forbid this relationship."

Richard stared at her.

"I am sure," William said, "that we can settle this matter without quarrelling. Especially on the day Richard has so happily, so miraculously, come back to us after ten years."

"You *forbid* it?" Richard asked, as though his father had not spoken.

"I am Célestine Grant," she said. "My husband, and your father, is the president of the Grant Company. As such he is the most powerful man in Brazil, except for His Majesty. And he is your father. It is your duty to obey him."

"Mother," Richard said, "Father is quite right, and it is tragic that we should quarrel on the day of my return. I shall not. I would be grateful if you would arrange a meeting for me with the bishop, that I may discuss the matter of Elena's consanguinity. But it will not change my mind in the slightest.



I would also be obliged if you would have Elena's boxes put in here, as this is the room in which she will be sleeping."

"Richard . . ."

"Unless you would prefer me to move out," Richard said. "I am sure I can obtain lodgings in town."

"Richard," Célestine begged, "it is *impossible*. Can't you understand that?"

"Mother, I shall marry Elena Grant, or I shall marry no one."

She gazed at him, then gave a brief laugh. "You said as much about poor Anne de Carvalho, ten years ago."

Richard frowned at her. "*Poor Anne de Carvalho? Is she dead?*"

"Who knows? The way that husband of hers keeps her locked up, she could well be. Not that she doesn't deserve everything that has happened to her. Consorting with black men, indeed!"

"Tell me more, please, Mother." Richard spoke quietly, urgently.

Célestine tossed her head. "Why should she interest you? You have another woman. Another tainted woman."

Richard gazed at her for some seconds, then left the room.

"He has changed," William observed. "He has become a man."

"A man?" Célestine demanded. "With the arrogant stubbornness of a boy."

"Yet you must be careful what you say to him, or he will take offense, if he has not already done so."

"I must be careful what I say to my own *son*? If indeed he *is* my son."

"For heaven's sake, Célestine. What are you saying?"

She paced the room, her bony hands curling and uncurling. "We have been cursed, and we have been stupid. We should never have sent him away to Portugal in the first place. Have the Grants not always prided themselves on their American heritage? I married an American, not a Portuguese, and yet I stupidly allowed my son to be sent to Portugal to be educated."

"Well," William said, "it was Mother's wish."

"Grandmother Kita," Célestine sneered. "She brought nothing but disaster to this family."

William stared at her. To speak ill of his mother was un-

thinkable. "You always loved and admired her."

"I admired her, the legends about her, when I came here. You may remember that I was only a girl, and I suppose I was afraid of her. You all were. Sometimes I think you still are. But I soon saw through her. I don't think she ever recovered from those years up the Amazon. And she was Portuguese."

"She was my mother," William said stiffly.

"Oh, you know what I mean. She's responsible for everything that is soft and uncertain in your character. Only a man like your father could ever have coped with her. She certainly made a mess of our lives. Sending Richard off to Portugal, indeed." She sighed. "But what's done is done. To all intents and purposes, he has been away from us fourteen years. Of course he is not our son anymore."

"But—" William could only deal with one fact at a time. "You wanted him to marry a Portuguese."

"A princess. That is a different matter. Besides, had he done as we wished, he would have been living here, where we could keep an eye on him, govern his ambitions. But to attempt to foist some mestizo on us . . . you will have to be absolutely firm, William. Either that girl goes, or we have no place for him here."

"You're not serious! Your own son?"

"My son? When have I ever truly had a son? I might as well have been barren. Anyway," she said, her tone softening, "it will not come to that. He knows how wicked he has been, just walking away from us for all these years, with hardly a letter. Well, now he has come crawling home, looking for his old place, and I shall be happy to give him that place. But as my son. Not as some adventurer with an Indian squaw slung over his shoulder. He won't defy you, William, not when you put the facts squarely to him."

"Well, of course," William said, "the bishop—"

"The bishop," Célestine said, this time hardly trying to disguise her contempt. "Of course, the bishop will be a help. But it is you who must be firm, William. Even harsh if you have to be. It is you who must make Richard realize, for the first time in his life, where his duty lies. He has bedded this little whore. All right. He can no longer have any great desire for her. He is merely being stubborn. We will be kind. We will load her with presents, and we will send her up the Amazon in a company ship. But she must go. What, do you really wish

to have little Indians crawling about this house, calling you Grandpa?"

William Grant sighed heavily. He had realized, over the years, that his wife had a streak of granite he himself did not possess. In many ways he admired her for it; it provided a strength he knew he lacked. But now it seemed about to provoke a crisis that he was sure could be avoided by a little patience and understanding. He could not help but feel that Célestine's anger was due less to the presence of Elena than to a fear that she would never be able to dominate her son, and therefore the family, the way Kita had done—the way she herself had done these past few years.

"I will see what can be done," he said.

"They hate me," Elena said. She lay against him, her head on his shoulder. "And because of that you have quarreled with them."

"My quarrel with my parents began long ago," Richard said. "Long, long ago."

"But they will not let me marry you." He had explained the importance of marriage on their long, slow voyage, first down the Amazon by canoe, and then from Belém in one of the Grant Company vessels. Now he wished he hadn't.

"Well," he said, "they may be able to do that, here. But it will make no difference."

"I shall remain your woman."

"Yes."

"But not your wife."

"That is irrelevant, Elena. In time I will inherit the Grant Company. Nothing can stop that. And then I will make the rules. Our children, your children, will inherit from me."

"I do not care about the Grant Company," she said. "I care only that you should be happy, that our children should be happy."

"And do you not wish for your own happiness?"

She kissed him. "When you are happy, I am happy. And now you are not happy."

He sighed, gently moved her arms, and got up to go to the window and look out at the sea. The sun was rising out of the ocean; it was just dawn. His mother had surrendered at least this much; she would not have let him move out on his first day back, after so many years. And she would surrender much

more, as she got used to Elena, to having him back, as she realized she could not force her own way upon them. He did not fear the future. He feared himself, the sudden lurking memory that had been so sharply reawakened, together with its suggestion of tragedy.

"Aye," he said. "Perhaps I should not have come back."

"But this is your home, your family. You had to come back."

"I suppose I did. But your father warned me I might not find things as I wished them to be. And now . . . there is something I must do. Will you excuse me?"

She sat up, the feather pillow held against her chest in alarm. "You are going?"

"Just for a walk. I must . . . find out some things." He leaned over the bed and kissed her on the forehead. "I shall be back in a little while."

He dressed and went downstairs, where the servants were just beginning the work of dusting, of opening the great shutters and destroying all the insects that had accumulated overnight. He gave them all a smile, and received eager greetings in reply. They at least seemed delighted to have him back.

He went outside, inhaling the crisp morning air, and turned down the lane that separated the Big House from the smaller Grant houses, then made his way around the Cutters' house, to the studio at the back, wondering if Aunt Inez had changed her habits as she had grown older. He knocked on the studio door, and it was opened by Inez herself, hair lost in a mob cap, and wearing a shapeless and paint-stained smock.

"Richard?" Instinctively she touched the unbecoming mob cap, then smiled at him. "You are an early riser."

"I wanted to speak to you before the house awakes."

She stepped back to let him in. He gazed at the half-finished canvases—one of Hal Cutter, others of shapeless men and women, only a few of the landscapes and seascapes which had made her famous.

"They are poor," she said. "They have always been poor."

"Modesty hardly becomes you," he said.

Her smile was twisted. "Self-criticism is essential for any artist. But I sometimes wonder if I was ever any good, if my success was because I was a young woman from a distant land, and because I was supported by Father's money."

"A cartoon can be a painting," he said.

She glanced at him. "But I'm sure you're not here to talk

about my painting. I'm sorry you have quarreled with Célestine so quickly."

"I suppose it was inevitable."

Inez sat down in her rocking chair. "Elena is my niece, and a lovely girl. But this is my home. I will not quarrel with your mother, Richard. Not even on your behalf."

"Have you no desire ever to see the Amazon again?"

She gave a little shudder. "That was many years ago . . . So James is still alive."

"And flourishing. But he grieves, and is bitter, that no member of the family, not even Grandmother Kita, ever visited him."

"He is a savage," she said, "just like his father. He refuses to accept the Church in his domains. He has turned his back upon all goodness in life."

"Did Grandmother Kita believe that?"

"Mama was . . . Mama."

"Aye. But remember, Aunt Inez, that Uncle James would welcome you, should you ever decide to visit him."

"I will remember," she said. "But I cannot support his attempt to insinuate his daughter into the family."

Richard sighed. But he could not truthfully deny the accusation. "You must do as your conscience tells you. I wished to speak with you on a different matter."

Inez waited.

"Would you tell me what has happened to Anne de Carvalho?"

She frowned at him. "Anne de Carvalho? You mean the princess de Coimbra?"

"Ah. She did marry Henry, then."

"Soon after you left. But it has been an unhappy business."

"He has ill-treated her?"

"I do not think so. Not without reason, anyway. She has turned out to be a very wicked woman, Richard. I scarcely know how to tell you, but she conceived a child by a black man."

"She did *what*?" But he had heard.

Inez nodded. "A slave of hers. I know it is scarcely credible, but they were taken *in flagrante delicto*. And when he was condemned, she broke out of her room and freed the scoundrel, letting him escape into the forest. He has never been heard of since."

"But did she not go with him?"

Inez shook her head. "Well, you could hardly expect a woman raised as Anne was to run away into the forest. But it would have been better if she had, because she was soon discovered to be pregnant. It was a terrible scandal. Of course, everyone hoped it was the prince's child, but after the birth . . . they attempted to hush it up, but everyone knew."

"My God," Richard said. "And the babe survived?"

"The babe was killed," Inez said.

"And the princess? Anne?"

"She has not been seen in public since."

"My God. Do you mean—"

"The prince keeps her under lock and key—with the approval of the entire community, I may add, including her own family. One sometimes supposes she must have been mad. Even her friend, Princess Félicité, was horrified by the business."

Richard discovered that his fingers had clenched into fists. Anne, and a black man. A slave. Even if she had been driven to despair by Henry . . . but she *must* have been driven to despair.

Inez was suddenly alarmed. "Don't try to see her, Richard," she said. "She is still Prince Henry's wife. And she is universally condemned. Besides, you have a woman of your own, whom you love."

"Yes," Richard said. "It is good to know that someone recognizes that fact."

"Hm," said the bishop. "I am afraid that your father—" He gave an apologetic smile to William Grant. "—and James Grant, having shared the same mother, even if not the same father, are nonetheless brothers. And of course the fact that their respective fathers *were* brothers but complicates the matter further." He paused, and frowned, to suggest that such incestuous happenings could never have occurred in his term of office. "Therefore I must rule that the children of such fathers are first cousins, between whom marriage is quite out of the question. Indeed, Richard, cohabitation amounts to incest."

"Are you threatening me with the Church, Your Grace?" Richard inquired softly.

The bishop coughed. "Certainly it would not be my wish to invoke the majesty of the law against you, Richard. I can

but ask you to consider the matter, to consider whether you do not owe a responsibility, a great responsibility, to your family no less than to the colony. Your lot, by the fortune of your birth, is one of leadership, which is not lightly to be squandered in affairs of the heart." He raised his finger as Richard started to interrupt. "Think, too, of the young woman. Her life as your mistress can never be anything better than a misery, as well as a sin. Her children will be damned."

"Return her to her own people, Richard, and she may well find happiness, and a lawful husband, and in the fullness of time become the mother of a family of happy, and healthy, and *legitimate* children."

Richard pushed back his chair and stood up. "I thank you for your comments, Your Grace. And for your advice."

"Rather should you consider them as interpretations of the law, my son, both canon and civil," the bishop said mildly.

"Then I shall so consider them, Your Grace," Richard said, and left the room.

"You cannot hope to defy church *and* state, Richard," William said, following him. "His Grace will go a long way to humor you, and indeed assist us, but he cannot remake laws."

They walked down the steps of the episcopal palace. "I do not accept his laws," Richard said. "They are pure hypocrisy. Why, Queen Maria herself married her uncle! For the last ten years I have made my own laws, and those are the laws I will live by."

"Now that is utter madness," William Grant protested. "It will lead to social disaster, if not, indeed, a jail sentence. For God's sake, Richard, you have enjoyed the best this girl has to offer, and we are in a position to make her a princely settlement, return her to her people laden with everything that is dear to an Indian's heart. What more can you wish for her?" He flushed as his son gazed at him.

"You speak to me of presents to some Indian squaw? Elena is my wife."

"I was but casting about for a solution to our problem. For God's sake, Richard, you must see that we are all trying to help you. But you—you will accept no help. Sometimes I think you have a devil inside you."

"A devil," Richard muttered. Could he deny that? Could he deny that the main part of his defiance arose from a sudden uncertainty? There was nothing he could do now. He had run

away, ten years before, and allowed events to take their course. And they had done just that. He could no longer interfere with what had happened. Even more, he could not expose Elena to shame and possible arrest. He must either renounce her, and send her back to her people, or go with her, and renounce Rio and his inheritance.

"At least consider the matter," William said, opening the carriage door for him. "There is no great urgency, providing you do nothing rash."

"Consider the matter," Richard said, half to himself, and looked past their own carriage at the one that had been moving slowly down the far side of the street. But now it had paused, apparently so that its occupant could survey him. "Is that not the princess de Coimbra?"

William Grant peered into the glare. "The Princess Félicité? Why yes, I think it is. But Richard, she is no friend of yours. Richard—" He bit his lip. Richard was already running across the street.

"Drive on," Félicité snapped. "Drive on."

The driver looked down at Richard, whose hand was on the bridle. Now he opened the door and got in. "Drive on," he agreed.

"You have the effrontery to speak to me?" Félicité said.

"Have you no welcome, dear Princess Filly, for a wanderer back after ten years?"

"You come back here with some Indian whore—"

"Filly," Richard said, "if you are not very careful, I shall box your ears."

"You—" She withdrew to the far side of the seat. "If you lay a finger on me . . ."

"You would squeal with delight." Richard moved closer. "Now tell me about Anne."

Her eyes flickered. "Anne?"

"The truth, Félicité." He picked up her hand, gave the fingers a gentle squeeze. "Every word of it."

"She conceived by a slave. That is common knowledge."

"Just like that?"

Filly shrugged. "Who knows what goes on inside a woman's mind?"

"You certainly know what goes on inside Anne's mind."

"I do not. We have drifted apart these past few years." Her



eyes widened as he squeezed her hand a little harder. "You are hurting me."

"I shall break every bone in your body if you do not tell me the truth."

"I am telling . . . ouch!" She banged on the roof with her free hand. "Stop the coach. Stop it and come to my assistance."

"Keep driving," Richard said, "or I shall break your head."

"You . . . I shall have you arrested. Oh!" Tears began to drip from her eyes. "Please! For God's sake."

"Just tell me, little Filly," Richard said, "how Anne got to be in such a mess. Because I know you are responsible. Tell me."

She screamed, then gasped as he suddenly released her. "Oh! You scoundrel . . . you—"

Richard picked up her other hand.

"Oh, all right," Félicité snapped. "She was miserable with Henry. Maybe she pined after you. My God, look at this." She held her crushed fingers up to the light.

"Go on," Richard said.

"Well . . . I tried to help. She used to come to visit me, and I bought her a slave. A handsome young buck. He was for *dalliance*, Richard. Nothing more. But Anne . . . you know Anne. She fell in love with him."

"Anne fell in love with a slave?"

"Well . . . she certainly appeared to. And Henry, of course, found out. I mean, she insisted upon moving the fellow to her house, and from all accounts took him to her bedchamber for siesta every day. Henry couldn't stand for that."

"And when he had the man arrested, Anne set him free. And has been kept locked up ever since. How long is it?"

"Well . . . a couple of years, I suppose. What else could Henry do? She gave birth to a mulatto. Can you believe it? After all I told her, all I taught her about syringes . . . she must have *wanted* to have that child."

"Aye," Richard said. "And had to watch it murdered."

"I doubt she actually saw it happen," Félicité said.

Richard glanced at her. "I wish to see her."

"You—that is quite impossible."

"You will attend to the matter, dear Filly."

"I? I should think not. You have no rights here, Richard. She is Henry's wife. He is entitled to do whatever he likes with her."

"You will arrange it, dear Filly."

"Why should I?"

"Because, as I suspected, you engineered the whole thing in the first place, and also because, if you do not, I shall find some pretext for challenging Henry to a duel, and I shall kill him."

"You wouldn't *dare*. His Majesty would have you arrested."

"I doubt that. But even if he did, you would still be without a brother. And you have no one else, since your mother died, have you?"

She glared at him. "You are an utter scoundrel."

"So I have been told."

"And what do you want with her? What *can* you want with her, after all this time?" Her lip curled. "Isn't your squaw sufficient for you?"

"Filly, you are well on the way to a beating. I wish to see Anne again, and you will arrange it. And quickly. Have her come to visit you. I am sure Henry will allow her out into your custody, after imprisoning her for two years."

"He might. If I asked him. If I thought it was worth my while to do so."

"What would make it worth your while?"

She gazed at him. "You. An hour of your company, in my bedchamber."

"You are utterly shameless."

"So they say."

"And what do you hope to gain, after all these years?"

She made a moue. "Perhaps I would like to discover what I have missed. But that is what I want. You. For an hour."

He hesitated. But was it such a price to pay? She remained a very pretty woman, and he need have no scruples about *her*.

"Very well," he said. "But I have no time to waste. I expect to hear from you within forty-eight hours, or I shall seek out Henry and insult him." He tapped on the roof. "You may stop now, and set me down." He opened the door, then turned back to her. "And, dear Princess Filly, in case you have any ideas of setting some hired bullies on me, please be sensible, or you will have their blood on your conscience. An interview, that is all I wish, and then you may have your reward."

He laid his plans carefully, and hearing from Félicité that Anne's visit could be arranged, chose the date to fit in with

the departure of a Grant Company vessel from Rio. Then it was only necessary to lie to his family, and on that day invite Elena to accompany Andrew and himself into town, and leave her and her maid to go shopping while they attended to some business. It was a pleasant reflection that he had, as yet, done nothing irrevocable, could always change his mind and return to Copacabana for supper.

But that was unlikely, for every instinct was driving him in the direction he wished to go. Thus he felt it necessary to confide in Andrew, as they walked their horses out of town; he could hardly expect his friend to risk at least a fracas, and probably a crime, with no knowledge of what it was all about.

"No doubt you know what you are doing," was Andrew's response.

No, Richard thought, I do not know what I am doing. I know that I have come straight from Elena's embrace, and that I long to return to that embrace. That I am deceiving the only creature in the world who loves me without reservation or question. And for what?

"You never asked me what demon drove me to enlist with Miranda," he said. "Or indeed has driven me ever since."

"The princess de Coimbra?" Andrew asked.

"Anne de Carvalho, as she was then."

"If rumor is to be believed, Richard, she is no longer the girl you knew then."

"No doubt you are right. Yet I feel responsible for much that has happened."

"I cannot see that you are. Nor can I see how you hope to help her in any way. She is another man's wife. This is not Venezuela, and you do not have a regiment of hussars at your back."

Richard smiled. "I have you at my side. Will you support me?"

"To the death, of course."

"Well, I doubt it will come to that." They had left the town behind now, and were approaching Félicité's plantation. "But we shall be on our guard for treachery, nonetheless." He had made sure they were both armed with swords as well as pistols.

They turned through the gate, between the fields of cane, and looked at the house in the distance.

"Suitable ground for an ambush," Andrew observed. "You could conceal a regiment in those stalks."

"I doubt Félicité will have gone to such lengths," Richard said. "I suspect she will be quite pleased to entertain me in her home."

"Another devil driving you on?" Andrew observed dryly.

"Oh, indeed." But he was in a good humor now; he could see the prince-de Coimbra's coach standing at the foot of the steps. A sudden suspicion crossed his mind that Henry might actually be waiting for him, but not even Félicité was quite as crazy as that. Besides, she would be looking forward to her reward.

They drew rein and were approached by the grooms. "The princess is expecting me. I am Richard Grant, and this is Mr. Cullen."

"Her Highness is expecting you," the slave agreed, and held their bridles.

Félicité herself waited at the top of the stairs, dressed as if for a bull, in a plunging gown of her favorite pale green, beneath which, Richard observed, she seemed to be wearing nothing at all, and with emerald earrings and brooches. Her hair was piled on the back of her head.

"Captain Cullen," she said gravely.

"Highness." Andrew kissed her hand.

"Richard?"

She presented her cheek, but he also kissed her hand.

Wretch," she muttered. "I have fulfilled my side of the bargain."

"Not yet."

"Well, she is waiting in my upstairs sitting room. You understand that I could not risk telling her why she was coming here. I merely begged Henry to release her into my custody for a day's outing."

"I understand that."

"I had better come up with you."

He shook his head. "You stay here and entertain Andrew."

She accompanied him to the stairs. "Richard . . . Don't do anything rash."

He blew her a kiss. "That's a question of interpretation."

He hesitated outside the door, listening to the pounding of his heart. What a mess he had made of things, a decade ago. If only he had been the man then that he was now.

But what could this man do, now, that the boy had been unable to do, then?

He turned the knob, stepped into the room, and closed the door behind him. Anne sat on a settee in the far corner, idly turning the pages of a book. "I doubt I shall be much company," she said. "I am unused to conversation. But it is good of you . . ." She turned her head, and stared at him.

"Anne." He took a step forward. She had not changed, except perhaps to put on a little weight, no doubt accounted for by lack of exercise. But she was no less attractive. Rather was she the most voluptuously desirable woman he had ever seen.

"Richard?" She stood up, looked from side to side as if she wanted to escape. "My God, *Richard?* Filly—"

"She arranged this meeting for me."

"But . . ." She bit her lip, color darting through her cheeks and seeping down to her throat. "How long—"

"Just two weeks. No one told you?"

She twisted her fingers together, watched him take another step toward her, and sat down again. "I am not told much," she said. "But since you have been back two weeks, *you* must have been told many things."

He sat beside her, could inhale her perfume. "Which is why I had to see you."

Her head turned. "Why? It is all true, whatever you have been told." Her mouth twisted. "There is no need to make up stories about Anne de Coimbra."

"May I ask how it happened?"

"You have no right to ask me anything. You have no right to be here."

"I am here," he said, and reached for her hand. She pulled it away, then relaxed, and let him take it. "Ten years ago, I was a boy. I knew that you were forced to write that letter to me, but I did not know how to overcome the obstacles in our way. So I ran away. I deserted you. Whatever has happened to you since is my fault."

Her eyes filled with tears. "That is an honorable thing to say, Richard. But—"

"Now I am a man. In the years we have been separated, I have learned to rely upon my own right arm, because there was nothing else to rely on. I have learned to discount laws and promises, dreams and ideals. I have learned that only survival matters, and that what is good for me is necessarily good for my friends. I have no time for my enemies. That means I have become a selfish villain. But a powerful villain.

I want to place that power at your disposal, Anne."

"You . . . What can you *do*? Henry is my husband."

"And you are content that that should be so?"

"Content? My God! Am I content to be locked up, day after day after day? To be visited when—" She flushed. "When the urge for my body comes upon him? That at least is not too often; he has other interests. But . . . never to see my family or friends, allowed only the same old books to read, over and over again . . . Content?"

His brain tumbled. What he considered was only madness. Yet it was already planned, awaited only the decision to carry it out.

"I could make you a free woman within twenty-four hours."

She stared at him. "Are you mad?"

"Very possibly."

"And you would do this—for me? Don't you understand, Richard? I have loved a black man. I have borne his child. I . . ." She sighed.

"—Love him now?"

Her shoulders rose and fell.

"Was he, then, so much of a man?"

She raised her head. "Yes. He was so much of a man."

"But now he is dead."

"No," she said fiercely. "I am sure he is alive. If any man could survive the forest, he could. Your grandfather's brother James survived the forest. Oranatoon is twice the man he was."

"You did not know Great-Uncle James."

"Neither did you," she said.

"No," he agreed, and got up. "Oranatoon. A name to remember." As James Grant was a name to remember, because of the desperate actions he had taken. "I have a wife," he said, not looking at her.

She made no comment.

"We are married before God. Before our concept of God. She is very lovely, very loving. But we are first cousins. I will not renounce her, and thus it seems impossible for us to stay in Rio."

She waited, gazing at him.

"So I will return to the Amazon, and wait for better times," he said. "At El Dorado, man lives by what he is, not by what his forefathers decreed he should be. Do you understand me?"

"I understand," she said. "You offer me the life of an outlaw,

without the comfort of your arms."

"I don't know." He turned to face her. "I love you. I think I have always loved you. I care not what you have done, what you have become. But I love Elena also. She is so easy to love. Oh, I . . . I am groping."

"Towards a confession of love for two women at the same time."

"Yes," he said. "Is that so heinous?"

"No. But it would require a good deal of acceptance from the women involved. Especially the outsider."

"Yes," he said, and attempted a smile. "I did confess to being a villain. I have told you what I can offer you. My decision is made. Rio is no place for me or Elena. I do not think it is any place for you, either. I will leave here today, on a ship for Belém, and then return up the river. I ask you to accompany me."

"To what?"

He sighed. "To freedom, at least."

"Freedom," she said, and sighed in turn. "Freedom to come between your Elena and yourself. Freedom to turn you into an outlaw. A criminal, hunted from one end of Brazil to the next. Freedom to make you hate me—as you will hate me, soon enough."

"Freedom," he said, "to live and die as you choose. Whatever happens between us, Elena will understand. Her people look on moral matters differently from us."

"But you will not renounce her."

"I cannot. She has given her all to me."

She smiled. "You are too typically masculine, Richard. You wish to have it all. You believe all can be accomplished. Well, it is a man's world. Who is to say you are not right?"

"Then will you risk everything to accompany me?"

"Don't be absurd. It is you who will risk everything. And lose it all."

"That is my concern."

"Is it? You wish to rescue me from Henry, regardless of what is entailed. Regardless of the fact that I have loved a black man. Or does that make me the more attractive?"

"You're being unfair."

"Of course I am. You have returned like a knight in shining armor, prepared to sacrifice all to rescue me. But you will do so on your terms, for I have no terms to set against you."

"And because of that you will spend the rest of your life in miserable captivity?"

"I would rather not."

"Well, then . . ."

It was her turn to stand, her hands still clasped in front of her. "You are offering me more than I had any right to expect again in my life, and I am eternally grateful to you. But I cannot accept. I have committed too many crimes to wish to add another to my list."

"What crime can you possibly commit now?" he asked. "Leaving Henry?" His tone was incredulous.

"Coming between you and Elena would be a crime."

"It will be my crime, if it happens."

"It will not happen," she said. "If I agree to come, I must come as though I were your sister."

He gazed at her.

She forced a smile. "I am putting my trust in your honor, of which you have just said you have none. But I believe in it, at least as regards myself. Will you honor me, Richard, and throw away everything for me, with no reward at the end of it? Believe me, it would be better for you to walk through that door without me, and live your life with Elena and the Grant Company, and let the past be the past."

Richard opened the door. "To see you smile, Anne, is reward enough. Without the past, there can never be a future. I am prepared to put my trust in that."

"Well," Félicité remarked. "You have made her smile. That is an accomplishment."

"I should like to go home now, Filly," Anne said.

"Home?" But . . ." Félicité glanced at Richard.

"We have had our conversation, Filly," he explained. "We have said all there is to be said."

"I see." Félicité's face closed like a trap. "And you will escort her. You must take me for a fool, Richard Grant. There is also the little matter of our bargain. Shall I tell Anne what it is?"

"Not if you intend to fulfill it," he said. "My dear Filly, I have no intention of escorting Anne. I am sure that would be unwise, to say the least. But since you have kept your promise to me, and since I intend to keep mine to you, it seems to me that both Anne and Andrew are superfluous. So if you would



be good enough to escort the princess de Coimbra, Andrew . . . ?”

“Of course, if the princess will permit me?”

Anne nodded.

“You mean—you mean you are going to stay?” Félicité cried in delight.

“Of course, dear Filly.”

“Well,” she said. “Well . . . you had best be off, Anne. I shall come to see you soon. We shall have lots to talk about.” She glanced at Richard. “I shall have lots to tell you.”

“I am sure you will,” Anne agreed. “I will say goodbye, Richard.” She held out her hand. “Perhaps we will meet again.”

“I am sure of it, Highness,” he said, kissing her knuckles. “Take good care of the princess, Andrew.”

“You may rely on me, Richard.” Andrew kissed Félicité’s hand. “It has been a great pleasure, Highness.”

“Well,” Félicité remarked, watching him assist Anne into her carriage. “So things didn’t turn out quite as you expected. Do you know, I had feared that after you had mounted her, you would be quite incapable of mounting me.”

“You were probably quite right. But since I did not mount her, Filly, I am in great haste. After all, I have waited years for this moment.”

“As have I, my darling Richard,” she said. “And doubted that it would ever happen.” She giggled as she led him up the stairs. “Oh, I am so happy. I see such a future for us, Richard, now that you know Anne for what she really is. As for that little Indian girl—listen, I am prepared to let you keep her as a mistress. I really don’t mind.” She opened her bedchamber door and dismissed her maids with a wave of her hand. “I can be very generous.”

“I know you can, dear Filly.” He locked the door.

“That is not necessary. No one would dare enter this bedroom without orders from me. We shall not be disturbed until I ring that bell. Oh, Richard . . .” She turned toward him, put her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the mouth, slowly and luxuriously, meanwhile working her body against his and reaching behind herself to unfasten her gown. With a shake of her hips it slid down to her ankles. She was, he realized, a surprisingly attractive woman, with a trim, compact figure, and obviously in the best of health. “Well, Richard?” she smiled. “Am I good enough for you?”

"I am sure you are far too good for me, dear Filly," he said, and from inside his boot drew his dagger and rested it against her throat.

"You—" She stepped backwards, and he caught her hair.

"If you utter a sound," he said, "I will cut your throat."

She stared at him, gasping, her mouth opening and shutting.

"Go back across the room," he said, "and lie on the bed."

She attempted a smile. "I did not know that there were twists to your lovemaking, Richard. Be sure that I shall submit to whatever you may desire. There is no need to brandish knives at me."

"Knives are all a part of the game," he said, gently urging her toward the bed. She struck it with the backs of her knees, and fell over, staring up at him. "Now don't move," he said. "I am going to tie you up."

"To . . . Not too tight."

"It must be tight, dear Filly," he said. "When I enter you, it must be tight."

She watched him with wide eyes but without a word of protest as he tore the sheet into strips, secured her ankles, one to each bed post, and then her wrists, above her head, leaving her spread-eagled and helpless in the middle of the bed.

"Oh, Richard," she said. "I feel a most tremendous urge coming over me. Oh, Richard, I have never been tied up before. Oh, Richard . . ."

"Open wide," he said, having torn the pillowcase as well.

Her mouth drooped in surprise, and he thrust the rolled cloth inside, securing it with another strip tied behind her head.

"Mmmmm," she said. "Mmmmm." She moved her head from side to side.

"Now, lie very still, and no doubt in the course of time someone will come in to you."

"Mmmmm," she shrielled, writhing in rage as she at last realized what was happening to her.

"Dear Filly," he said, "I know that I am behaving like an utter scoundrel. I beg you to forgive me, and to reflect upon the number of times in your life that you have behaved like an utter bitch." He bent over her, kissed her on the forehead, and gazed into her green eyes, so suggestive of a cold furnace in hell. "And if we ever meet again, which I doubt, I give you my word that I shall fulfill my side of the bargain." He left the room.

\* \* \*

"I do not believe it," Anthony Grant said for the fourth time. "I just do not believe it."

Célestine gazed at him in scornful anger. "I do. He is not my son. He is a changeling. God knows how he came from my womb. I cannot believe that he did." She glared at Inez. "What are you smiling at?"

"I am thinking that whatever he is, Richard is a Grant. Oh, most certainly a Grant. He could be a reincarnation of either Father or Uncle James. Maybe both together."

"He is a scoundrel. An utter scoundrel. He *must* be punished."

"But *how* did it happen?" Anthony asked plaintively. "I still do not understand."

"It was obviously carefully planned," Célestine said. "With that friend of his, no doubt. And his half-breed whore. Oh, carefully planned. They inveigled Princess Félicité into inviting her sister-in-law to her house for a meeting with Richard—how she did not know what was going to happen is a mystery to me—and of course once they got there, they seized the unhappy girl and tied her up, and made off with Anne. Do you know, they pretended to seduce her? Stripped her naked, left her in bed, and told her servants she was not to be disturbed. She lay there for *four* hours. I am told she could hardly speak from rage and humiliation. A princess! And then they assaulted the coachmen as well; the carriage was found abandoned, with the two drivers tied up inside."

"And Richard had already arranged passage on the *Neptune*? I do not see why we were not told."

Célestine shook her head impatiently. "Of course he had not arranged that in advance. He did not need to. He is Richard Grant. He just appeared, as they were casting off, and told the captain he was accompanying them."

"You cannot blame the captain," William said. "As you say, it was Richard. And the captain did not know the princess of Coimbra. How could he possibly suspect she was being stolen from her husband? Obviously she was willing enough."

"Oh, obviously," Célestine said. "She is nothing but a whore herself. And now ... an outlaw ... I am amazed that we are not all under arrest."

"Well, we had nothing to do with it," William reasoned. "And this letter, a copy of which was apparently also sent to

His Majesty, entirely absolves us." He held it out.

"Oh? Tell me what it says," Célestine said. "I have no desire to read his writing."

"Well . . . briefly, he explains that it has become obvious to him that he cannot remain here, since Elena is unacceptable to us or to the Church as his wife, and that therefore he has decided to return to Elena's people. He explains that taking Anne is an act of atonement—"

"Ha!" Célestine muttered.

"—In that he feels responsible, through his own weakness, for what has happened to her. He also explains that he could not consult us beforehand, since not only would we have attempted to stop him, but he would have involved us in his guilt."

"Which is perfectly true," Hal Cutter said.

"Of course it is true," Célestine said. "And now he is guilty of abduction, assault, rape . . ."

"I doubt rape is an issue," William said.

"Oh, do not quibble," Célestine snapped.

"Well . . ." William folded the letter. "It is done. His Majesty is despatching a warship after the *Neptune*, but of course Richard will have reached Belém and gone up the river long before they can catch up. His Majesty is discussing with me the possibility of sending officers up the river with a warrant for his arrest, but I am afraid that since Richard is returning to Elena's father, the warrants could not be served without the support of soldiers. And that is hardly practical as long as the war with Buenos Aires drags on. There will have to *be* a settlement of this affair, of course. We can only hope that tempers will cool with the passage of time."

"The passage of time?" Célestine scoffed.

"I must say," Inez said, "it is just like Uncle Jamey's adventure all over again. And he got away with it."

"Until his murder," Anthony pointed out.

"No one has mentioned Prince Henry," Hal Cutter said quietly. "Has he no feelings in the matter?"

"Well, he is uttering all manner of threats," William said. "But principally because of the insult to his sister. I have a feeling he is only too pleased to be rid of his wife. The question we must face is, What are we going to do? There is no doubt that we must make some gesture of our own, such as sending after Richard and attempting to have him return here to stand

trial. Otherwise we may well find ourselves losing some of our trading privileges. His Majesty is very angry. But it should be possible to come to some arrangement with him that Richard's sentence be just a nominal one, providing that Anne de Coimbra is returned in good health."

"You are building castles in the sky," Inez said. "Richard will never surrender himself. Or Anne."

"We must try," William said. "Richard is my son. I cannot endure the thought of him remaining an outlaw all of his life. I—"

"He is no son of yours," Célestine said, getting up.

"Now, my dear—"

"Nor of mine, any longer. I do not know when it happened, but at some stage he ceased to be ours, and became some sort of a criminal. Well, I wish nothing more to do with him. I disown him. And so will you. You say we must do something to prove to His Majesty our innocence in this affair? I will tell you what we shall do. We shall publicly disinherit that scoundrel who so unhappily bears our name. We shall cast him out, end his inheritance, and never mention him again."

"Now, Célestine," William began.

"You cannot," Inez cried. "One thing Father always insisted on was that the family came first. We settle our own affairs, just as he settled with Uncle Jamey. By all means send after Richard. By all means have him arrested, by Grant agents. But—"

"Your father is dead," Célestine reminded her. "William is now the head of the family, and I am his wife. Thus I disown Richard. Now, and for always."

"It is not quite so simple as that," William said. "I am sure you will think differently when you have had the time to consider . . ."

"I shall not think differently," Célestine said. "I shall never accept him in this house again. Or in the business."

"He is named as my successor in Father's will," William pointed out.

"Wills can be set aside."

They stared at her.

"Richard is a criminal," she said. "His crime has been committed against the royal house of Braganza, no less. That will can be set aside. Do not doubt that."

William stared at Anthony.

"But . . . the company," Anthony said. His eyes were gleaming.

"Have you no stomach at all," Célestine demanded, "to speak your own mind? We all know in whose hands the company will do best. A man who was the first to suffer from Richard's waywardness, and from his grandfather's softness. We will send for Charles. He is the man to restore the Grant fortunes. And he is the man to do something about Richard, as well."

## Chapter 12

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"Belém," Richard said, leaning on the rail to level his telescope. "Thank God for that." He swung the glass south and surveyed the empty horizon.

"One would almost suppose that you feared being recalled to Rio, Mr. Grant," the captain said, at last putting into words what he had obviously been thinking for some time.

Richard smiled at him. "It is news I fear," he said. "My . . . my father-in-law is unwell, you see. That is my reason for haste." And further news might have been sent to Rio after we left."

"I had no idea," the captain said sympathetically. "But we will be anchored by sundown. You will be able to leave first thing tomorrow morning."

"I will be able to leave tonight," Richard said.

"You will attempt the river at night?"

"It presents no problem, in a canoe," Richard pointed out. "And El Dorado is weeks away no matter how fast we travel. Now, if you'll excuse me."

He gave a last look at the southern horizon, then went down the companion ladder to where Elena and Anne sat over their sewing. They had both fled Rio with but a single gown apiece, so this was a necessary daily chore. But it was one that Elena, at least, thoroughly enjoyed, as she had just learned to use a needle from Anne.

The contrast between the two women could hardly have

been greater. Quite apart from their physical differences, with Anne both tall and voluptuous while Elena was short and slight, their different backgrounds were also revealed in the way Elena had already stripped to her shift, while Anne, if forced to remove her gown in order to mend it, sat with a blanket draped over her shoulders.

Her modesty presented but one aspect of the problem that was growing upon him all the time—for he had begun to long for the sight of her naked: Anne was still the most exciting woman he had ever known. For the sake of that excitement he had sacrificed much, as she was unhappily aware. Yet throughout the two weeks' voyage up the coast they had spent not a moment together alone, however much time the four of them had necessarily shared, even to the cabin they jointly occupied. Thus he and Anne both felt guilty, and regarded Elena almost as their joint conscience, even though Richard, at least, knew that to Elena, brought up to the communal customs of her Indian village, another woman was neither a rival nor an equal, but just another woman.

Yet was she far more aware than she suggested.

"Belém," he said. "Belém is in sight. What a relief."

They gazed at him.

"We shall be ashore by dusk," he said. "Do you suppose the canoe is where we left it, Elena?"

"Of course," she said. "It was well concealed."

"Well, I will confess that I shall be happy to get aboard," he said. "I have no doubt at all that there is a warship somewhere behind us. But once we are on the river, we have nothing to fear."

"This river," Anne said, her head bowed over her sewing. "How long is it?"

"No man knows. Several thousand miles."

"Several *thousand*? But . . . how long will it take us to reach El Dorado?" At last she raised her head, revealing genuine concern.

"Two or three months, at least. Maybe more."

"Just . . . the four of us?"

"Aye. It has been done before. Why, Elena and Andrew and I came down the river alone."

Her eyes seemed to glaze over. It was a world of which she knew nothing, perhaps did not wish to know.

Elena put down her sewing and got up. "I would like to see Belém," she said.



He followed her up the ladder, and onto the quarterdeck, where Andrew was already standing, gazing at the approaching shore.

"There's a happy sight," he remarked.

"I did not expect to hear you say that," Richard said. "I thought you found more of interest in Rio."

"More of interest, certainly. But more of safety here."

"Aye," Richard said, and glanced at the captain, standing above them on the poop. "Go and talk with him, Andrew. He is beginning to suspect our haste."

Andrew nodded, and climbed the ladder.

"And you, miss," Richard said, throwing his arm around Elena's shoulder. "Do not tell me you are missing Rio, when your own country is in sight."

"They hated me," she agreed, "But it was very beautiful."

"Well . . . no doubt we shall revisit it, when circumstances have changed."

"We will revisit it, Richard?"

"Do you doubt that?"

"I think that the princess is more the woman with whom you would wish to visit Rio."

He looked down at her, and she met his gaze. "You are talking like a white woman, instead of an Indian."

"Well," she said, "am I not both? And is it not a white woman you will require when you return to Rio?"

"When I return to Rio," he said. "It will be with you at my side, Elena, or I shall never return."

"This woman," she said. "This princess, for whom you have sacrificed so much . . ."

"I have sacrificed nothing," he said. "My heart is with your father and his people. And with you."

"For whom you have sacrificed so much," she repeated. "She has also sacrificed a great deal for you. Even imprisoned by her husband, she was yet a princess. Now she is ruined forever."

"She will find happiness," he insisted. "Freedom must bring greater happiness than she has known."

"She will find happiness only with you, Richard. Only with you. I would like her to find happiness."

"And you?"

She smiled. When Elena smiled, she was the most beautiful girl in the world. "If you do not want to come to me, Richard, after one such as she, then I do not want you to come."

\* \* \*

These words, Richard understood, reflected both her love for him and her Indian upbringing, as well as her confidence. She did not understand the force with which she meddled, or the insidious appeal she had so carelessly made to all that was base and lustful in his character. He had given Anne his word, but what did solemn promises count once within the embrace of the forest, where humanity became of equal importance with the humblest ant, and only survival mattered?

Even Anne would very soon have to realize that. The moment they left the docks at Belém, she was out of any element she had ever known. As the sun sank into the tree mass behind the town, they made their way through narrow streets, which rapidly degenerated into mere tracks between shanties, where garbage and dead dogs littered the gutters, and naked children stood and stared at them.

Anne gave him an anxious glance, and he held her arm to hurry her forward. Then they were in the trees, with the huge whisper of the river close at hand, and branches reached out to tug at her skirts and her hair. She gazed in disturbed amazement as Elena now removed the last of her clothing, and flitted through the undergrowth like the naked nymph she was. Now Anne would not look at Richard at all, and concentrated instead on slapping at the swarms of mosquitoes which arose to feast on her soft skin.

"My God," she muttered, "do people *live* in these conditions?"

"It will be better on the water," he promised her, and listened to Elena's whistle. She had found the canoe.

Anne stood on the bank, her shoes slowly sinking into the ooze, and gazed at the tiny craft. "We will travel a thousand miles and more in *that*?"

"It is more secure than you imagine," he said.

"But . . . what about food? And water?"

"The river will be fresh soon. As for food—" He pointed to Elena carefully cleaning off her bow and arrow. "—we are surrounded by it."

He and Andrew waded into the shallows and held the canoe for her to climb in. Her legs were wet to the knees, and she gave a little squeak of alarm as the craft rocked dangerously.

"Just sit in the middle, facing forward," Richard said. "Your weight will help to stabilize the boat."

She settled herself uneasily, and the three of them took their places and their paddles. A moment later they were gliding through the water, leaving the trees and the insects behind.

"The Amazon," Anne murmured.

Richard smiled at the nape of her neck. "Not yet. This is the Pará, one of the mouths of the Amazon. We should join the main flood in a week or so."

After a while she appeared to sleep, to be awakened by the harsh roar of the howler monkey, reverberating from the trees, which were now several hundred yards away. Soon afterwards it began to rain, a deadly, monotonous downpour, drops as big as hailstones, which stung their heads and soaked their clothing. The men responded by copying Elena; the rain merely bounced off their naked flesh. Anne sat with bowed head, occasionally shivering.

By dawn she slept, a sodden huddle, and now Richard, satisfied with the progress they had made during the night, guided the canoe in to the bank, where they could step ashore and stretch their muscles, while Elena immediately moved into the shallows with her bow and arrow.

Now Anne awoke, looking around herself in horrified amazement, at the vast, slow-moving river, the trees that seemed to reach forever into the sky, and then the two naked men, busily preparing a fire.

She gave a little gasp, and turned back to the water's edge. Richard stood at her shoulder. "You will become accustomed to this," he said, and added, "you would be more comfortable if you shed those wet clothes."

"And become a savage?" She stared at Elena, picking her way through the shallows, a large fish transfixed on her arrow.

"It's the way to survive in the forest. The only way."

She sat down, facing away from them, while the fire was lit and the fish roasted. She ate slowly, her face a mask of carefully composed concern.

"Do you regret what you have done?" Richard asked.

She hesitated. "No," she said. "I know that you are right. I know that it is the life we live in places like Rio that is artificial, and wrong, and even unhealthy." She forced a smile. "I too have read Grandmother Kita's book."

"But you cannot accept it."

"I can accept it," she said. "I will. But it requires time. I . . ." She half-turned her head, and color flared into her cheeks.

"I am not sure I would be able to keep our vow. I am not sure you would be able to keep yours, if we sat on this bank together, naked as the day we were born."

"Would we want to?" he asked. "Those vows were suited to Rio, not the Amazon."

She glanced at him, then at Elena, who squatted by the fire, facing them, demolishing the last of the fish with her fine white teeth.

"I am coming to realize," Anne said, "that you have sacrificed nothing. This life appeals to you far more than any wealth or power you might enjoy in Rio."

"You may well be right," he agreed. "I did not realize it myself, until I got back. There is too much hypocrisy, too much dishonesty, necessary to the practice of civilization. There is nothing dishonest about the forest, or about the creatures that inhabit it. And that includes the humans. If you are an enemy, they try to kill you. If you are not, if you are a friend, then they share everything they have with you, without reservation."

"And only the strongest survive," she said.

"Perhaps. That is nature's way."

"And what of your family? Your mother and father?"

He sighed. "They are, more than any others, civilized."

"You are saying they are hypocritical and dishonest."

"Why, yes, so I am. Had Grandfather Jack lived, or Grandmother Kita, things might have been different. Had Aunt Inez, even, been the head of the family, things might have been different. She knows that other values exist besides those in Rio."

"I had not realized how deeply you feel about it," she said. "And the company, your inheritance?"

He smiled. "It will survive. By now, I would wager they have already sent for Charles."

"He hates you."

"I do not exactly love him."

"And do you not suppose, once he is president of the company, that he will hunt you down?"

Richard shrugged. "He is welcome to try. But I do not expect him to undertake anything like that for a long time. He will be too busy enjoying his new prerogatives. Well, the best of luck to him."

"What are you saying is that you will never go back," she said.

"Aye. What I am also saying is that you will never go back either, Anne. This is your home, from now on. Believe me, it is possible to be happy here. Happier than you can ever have been before, in Lisbon or Rio."

She gazed at him for some seconds then got up to unfasten her sodden bodice.

"Letters, Mr. Grant." The clerk placed the pile of envelopes on the desk in front of Charles.

Charles smoked a cheroot as he stared out the window. "Where the devil is Cheyney?"

"Ah . . . he stepped down to the docks, sir. Said he was expecting some news."

"He was, was he?" Charles waved his hand, and the boy left the room. News of the *Niobe* was what Cheyney was after. More than a year had passed since his meeting with Lobo, a year in which the vessel had made six Atlantic crossings, and survived them all. After every voyage Lobo faithfully reported how circumstances and weather had made it impossible for him to carry out his side of the bargain. Now she was due in again, after another trouble-free voyage, he supposed. Well, he thought, this was the last. Cheyney continually advised him to give Lobo one more chance, but this time Lobo would have to repay the money, and be forgotten—and if he could not repay the money, he would have to be disciplined savagely. Even murderously, as he had been threatened? Charles did not care to think about that; he had no doubt that Cheyney would provide a solution.

Idly he slit the envelope from Rio; his father was a conscientious correspondent, who kept him up to date with all the news, no matter how boring . . .

Damn it! His mistake had been in trusting Lobo in the first place, he thought bitterly. Certainly in giving him so much time—time in which Berkeley Carew had merely increased his business. He remained, Charles estimated, in a financial crisis; apparently he had taken accounts away from the Grant Company not only by using his membership in Beacon Hill society, but also by offering even lower freight rates. Thus there was no way he could be making enough profit to replace any part of his fleet. But he was keeping his head above water, even if narrowly.

And none of that seemed to matter to the Harringtons. On

two occasions when the Grants had been asked to dine on the Hill, Carew had completed the party, ostensibly as a partner for Pansy, but always whispering to Joanna, who invariably responded with a glowing smile. As for the elder Harringtons, they sat by benevolently, hardly acknowledging the presence of their son-in-law at all. And when, on the second occasion, he had managed to get himself alone with Bayley Harrington, and had said, "I wonder we do the best thing in seeing so much of Carew, Father? I can tell you the rumor in town is that his business is on the slide," Harrington had merely given him a long look, and remarked, "We'll have no slander in my house, Charles. I'll thank you to remember that."

Silly old gasbag, Charles thought. How he'd like to . . . but there was nothing he *could* do, there was the problem. It had all seemed so *easy*. Except for Lobo. God damn Lobo. How he'd like . . .

He had been carelessly skimming over his father's letter while he had brooded, hardly taking in the words, until the import actually forced itself into his brain. Then he slowly sat up, and began the letter over again.

The door opened, and Cheyney burst in. "Mr. Grant!" he shouted. "Mr. Grant!" Hastily he closed the door again and lowered his voice. "The *Niobe* has gone down, sir. Last night. She struck a rock off Deer Island in that fog, and sank in minutes."

Charles raised his head to stare at him.

"It's done, sir," Cheyney said, his voice sinking to a whisper. "Done. Carew will be ruined. They're already saying that, on the waterfront. But the best thing, Mr. Charles . . . you won't credit this, but Lobo drowned. The cold water, you see, sir. Some others, too, of course."

He paused, as his employer continued to stare at him, face expressionless.

"Mr. Charles?"

"That is good news," Charles said absently.

"Good news, sir?" Cheyney scratched his head. "Hasn't this been your main ambition for months?"

"My ambition? Why, so it has. My ambition." Charles gave a sudden bellow of laughter, and got up. "I am going home early today, Cheyney. I must celebrate."

"Of course, sir. There's the matter of the widow. Our promise to Lobo."

Charles looked at him. "His contract had expired, Cheyney. I don't want to hear anything more about it."

He half-ran out of the office, leaving Cheyney and the clerks staring after him in amazement. He flogged his horse up the avenue, scattering passersby. His heart throbbed and his mind swirled. What jokes God played with helpless humanity, he thought. His greatest ambition realized: Carew was ruined, Lobo dead. And how absurdly irrelevant it was, as it had been irrelevant for him ever to fear the one or need the other. Because Charles Grant would never *need* anyone, ever again.

Not even Joanna and her horde of relations. Especially not Joanna. It was her turn to need him. To be at the mercy of *his* moods, for a change.

There was a row of equipages at the steps. She was having one of her tea parties. This was better and better! He wanted all the world, and especially the Harrington world, to be present when he told her. He waved aside the butler and the maidservant and the bootblack, paused only long enough to gulp his glass of brandy, and entered the drawing room, thumbs as ever tucked into his vest, to smile at them.

"Why, Charles." Whatever her surprise, Joanna's voice was as quiet as ever, just as every hair on her head was in its place. "How nice to see you home early. There's nothing wrong, I hope?"

He kissed her cheek. "Nothing wrong, my dear. Nothing wrong." He stepped around her, beamed at Edith Harrington, at Pansy—still unmarried, poor thing—at Mrs. Beddowes and her daughter, and at Frannie Brooke, a Harrington cousin; each one slowly put down her teacup at his unwanted masculine intrusion. A monstrous legion of women, he thought, filling his home, whispering to his wife. No matter that they all seemed to like and admire him. He resented *them*. But now he did not have to resent them anymore. Now he could treat them with the contempt they deserved.

"Why, Charles, my dear boy," Edith Harrington said, "you look as if all the devils in hell have been riding behind you. Your hair needs brushing."

Instinctively Charles put up his hand to obey her command, and then remembered that it was not necessary to obey her commands ever again. He lowered his hand. "No doubt, Mother," he said. "I came home in haste, to tell Joanna the news."

"The news, Charles?" Frannie inquired. "Do not tell us we are at war again!"

"Nothing so boring as that, my dear Frances," he said. "It is simply that Joanna and I are returning to Brazil."

There was a moment of shocked silence.

"Brazil?" boomed Edith Harrington. "Brazil? Joanna is going to Brazil? Nonsense! My daughter can't go to Brazil."

"I'm afraid we must leave on the first available ship, Mother," Charles said, with quiet satisfaction. "And that is in three weeks." He smiled at her open-mouthed shock. "I have been recalled to take my cousin's place as future president of the Grant Company."

"I know it is the most tremendous news," Joanna confessed, "for you. For us. I only wish you had found it possible to break it a little more gently to Mother. She really was quite upset."

"Now, my love." Charles smiled the length of the dining table. "How could I break it any more gently? We *are* leaving in three weeks."

"And you are delighted."

"Of course I am. Aren't you?"

Joanna raised her head, and the butler hastily stepped forward to hold her chair as she got up. "I suppose I am. I am still a little confused. It is such an immense step. I mean . . . What are we going to do about the house? The children?"

Charlie also got up, and followed her into the small sitting room, where coffee and brandy waited for them. "The children will come with us, of course. They'll return to Boston for school when they are older, perhaps. But of course at this age they must come with us."

"To Brazil?" She sat down and poured. "But . . . what about things like church?" Secure in the support of Bayley Harrington, she had refused to contemplate changing her religion, nor had she been prepared to agree to her children's being educated as Catholics. Technically, such an attitude should have made the marriage impossible, but Charles had decided that to marry a Harrington was worth bending a few rules—he had been able to think of no other certain road to prosperity. What a short-sighted fool he had been.

But it would be disastrous to have a quarrel on that score now; Father had laid great stress on how impressed the family had been by his successful marriage into a Boston Brahmin family.



"I shall build you your own chapel," he said. "Import your own minister. It's not the end of the world, you know, my love." He selected a cigar and clipped the end; a footman held the match for him. "The children will adore Brazil, and the family will adore them, and you. As for this house—well, it really belongs to the company. I think we shall let my replacement live in it."

"But it's *my* house. Our house."

"You will have another house, of your very own, in Rio," he said. "In the course of time, you will have the Big House."

Joanna nodded at the footman, who withdrew to stand just outside the door. "I still wish I could understand what has happened. You told me that you would never actually be the head of the company, and indeed that you doubted you would ever return to Brazil. And now . . ."

"Things have changed, my love. That cousin of mine, Richard, has turned out to be just the reprobate I had always supposed him. A reincarnation of Great-Uncle Jamey, according to Father. And *he* was an utter criminal."

"Charles, please," Joanna protested.

"It is time to call a spade a spade, Joanna. Down in Brazil life is certainly a little less refined than you are used to. You must accept that. And now this cousin of mine, Richard, not content with attempting to foist a mestizo mistress on the family, has actually abducted a princess and taken her off up the Amazon. I'm afraid it looks as if he is going to wind up on the gallows."

"The gallows? But how terrible! Your own cousin?"

"He is best forgotten. And so the family have turned to me, because there must be a Grant to take over from Uncle William, don't you see? And that's not even the half of it. It means that little Bayley will inherit from *me*. He'll be president of the Grant Company."

"Yes," Joanna said doubtfully.

"You don't really understand what that means, do you? You think it is *just* a business. My love, the Grant Company is one of the mainstays of Brazil, both politically and economically. One of my uncles is an Indian chieftain. Well, of course he's white, but he rules a veritable kingdom up the Amazon. Not that he is likely to be up there much longer, since it is to him that Richard has apparently fled. We shall have to see about that. But it will give you some idea of the scope of the family. We have always been the most important people in Rio—well,

after the viceroy and the royal family, of course. But we are their friends. I have royal blood in my veins."

"So you have told me, often enough," Joanna said, even more doubtfully.

He glared at her in sheer irritation. "Well, I can tell you that things are happening down there. According to Father's letter, King John is at last settling his differences with the Portuguese people, and will soon return there as king. But he will leave his son and heir, Pedro, to act as his regent in Brazil. I know this boy. He must be about twenty. He will need advice, and help. He will need leading."

She frowned. "And you propose to do that?"

"Well..." He paced up and down the room. "Father and Uncle William always eschewed politics. They said that if they kept the economy healthy, healthy politics would follow. Well, it hasn't altogether worked, has it? With his wars and his building, King John all but bankrupted the colony as regent, and Lord only knows what he's doing as King. A stand still will have to be taken, and I have always thought the Grant Company should be the center of reasoned advice to the monarchy. Now if Prince Pedro in fact stays behind..."

"I had not realized you were so ambitious," she said softly.

"And you do not approve."

She shrugged. "I know little of kings, and Indian princes." She smiled. "We saw the last of both those phenomena more than forty years ago, at least here in Boston."

"You replaced them with the dollar," he said contemptuously. "Money is your father's god, his sole reason for being."

"He is a businessman," she said quietly. "As are you."

"I have been forced to be a businessman, thus far. Now things are changing. I shall use my business success merely as a tool, as it should be used."

"To achieve political power?"

"Why not? Do you not approve? Don't pretend your father doesn't indulge. He may not run for office himself, but he certainly finances those who do, if they happen to agree with his point of view."

"I know nothing about politics," she said, and got up. "And my mind is still in a whirl at the news. There is so much to be done, so much organization... I think I shall retire."

He caught her arm. "You hate the idea. You are afraid of it."

She gazed at him. "Why, yes, perhaps I am. I have never left Boston, really, in my life."

"And you won't have a legion of mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and uncles and aunts, to come to your aid whenever you wave your hand."

She frowned. "Will I need their aid, Charles?"

How he wanted to slap her face. To do anything that might bring some real emotion into her face.

"No," he said. "Not if you are my wife, in all things."

"As I am," she said. "I find that very reassuring." She looked down at his hand. "Are you coming to bed?"

He released her. "I'll stay up for a while. There is so much to be thought about. Richard! I wonder where that devil is now. What he is up to. He will have to be dealt with. Father says he has taken refuge with Uncle James, and the Indians, but they'll hand him over quick enough. I won't feel secure until I know he is dangling from a rope."

"My dear Charles, the man is your cousin."

"Which doesn't mean I must love him. I nearly killed him once; I should have done it. By God, when next we meet—"

"I would rather not talk about it," she said. "I would hope that your attitude toward your cousin will always be civilized. Whatever he has done, he is your own flesh and blood. Good night."

He reached for her again as she opened the door, caught her arm and turned her to face him, her mouth open in disapproving surprise.

"It is a new world you are going to, my love," he said. "You must get that through your head. You must learn to live with that." He grinned at her. "You will have to learn to speak Portuguese."

"You are hurting me," she said quietly.

All his angry frustration seemed to bubble in his belly. She had done her best to put a damper on his tremendous news, just as she would continue to try to put a damper on all his ambitions. She had no need of ambitions. Her father was Bayley Harrington, and for a woman that was all that was needed. He suddenly realized that he hated her.

He could of course shatter her equanimity by a few words, the news of Carew's disaster. But he decided against it. She'd find out tomorrow anyway, and it was better to pretend he knew nothing of it.

"Will you *please* let me go," she said.

He released her, then held her shoulders and brought her against him.

"Charles," she protested. "The servants."

He kissed her mouth, and, while his lips held hers, put up his hands to drive his fingers into her hair, shedding pins and clips on the floor, bringing that auburn splendor over her shoulders.

"*Charles!*" she said, jerking her head back. "Of all the absurdities."

He smiled at her. "You just said, my love, that you were my wife in all things. I think I *shall* come to bed now." He put his arm round her waist, marched her past the impassive footmen, and watched an embarrassed flush spreading from her neck. "We are going to share, you and I, as we have never shared before. And when I put a noose around Richard's neck, you'll be looking on. Because in Brazil, my love, without me, you will be *nothing*."

## Chapter 13

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"Listen." Elena held up her finger, and the men stopped paddling, allowing the canoe to drift forward into the slow-moving current. And now they too could hear the distant whistling. "Those are our people," she said. "They know we are coming, but they do not yet know who we are."

"Will they attack us?" Anne asked.

Elena, kneeling in the bow of the canoe, shook her head. "They will find out first." But she frowned as she spoke, and looked over her shoulder at Richard. There was a peculiar urgency about the whistling.

Anne also looked over her shoulder, asking a question with her eyes. She could do this now. She could even look at Andrew without flushing and immediately turning away. It had not been easy for her, not only because of her background and upbringing, but because of her circumstances. As she had said, that day on the river bank, so many weeks ago, she did not know how she would react, or how he would react. When she had shed her clothes it had been a conscious act of will, a determination to match Elena, perhaps, and certainly to be what Richard had decreed she must be. But for days afterwards she had said little, had kept to herself, unable to accept that what she had done was the most natural thing in the world, that if they glanced at her body it was not lustfully, that their obvious admiration should be no more embarrassing than admiring glances at her face.

This was how it should have been. And how, no doubt, it was with Richard, at least consciously. But she knew too well the raging desires that lurked in his heart, could even from time to time observe the results of them. Yet he had never presumed to trespass, never even allowed himself to touch her, and spent his days sitting or kneeling in the canoe, watching her slowly browning body, the wealth of dark hair curling around her shoulders, the gentle cleft of her buttocks, occasionally the droop of heavy, sensuous breast as she half-turned or trailed her fingers in the water.

He gave them as little time to think as possible. The long hours of paddling left him so exhausted that when they came to the bank to camp, he could do no more than make their fire and sleep, while she attempted to copy Elena and learn the art of survival in the forest. Elena was delighted to play the teacher, even if she clearly did not understand what was preventing Anne from sleeping next to Richard, and because of this, seldom did so herself, unless he summoned her.

"I do not know," she would say when they were alone, "why you do not take her, since you desire her, and she desires it also. White people are strange."

"Aye," he agreed. "It is a matter of vows and promises, of upbringing and inhibition."

"But it will happen," she pointed out. "It must. So why do you make yourselves unhappy? That is stupid."

"I can never be unhappy," he said, "when I can hold you in my arms, my dearest love."

She did not often press the matter. Yet was she entirely right, as Richard well knew. It had to happen. By playing the gentleman he was not only being a hypocrite himself, after his fine words about turning his back upon civilization, but he was indeed making them both miserable, prolonging the embarrassment of existing alongside the woman he most wanted in all the world, in conditions of utter intimacy, without seeking the natural conclusion.

But he had decided to wait until they reached El Dorado; to wait, while admiring her beauty, while feeling his love for her growing, while looking ever forward, and thus forgetting all about the life he had foresworn forever. This had made him all the more impatient to reach their destination, even without the urgency of the whistling, which had Elena looking anxiously from side to side. At last she waved her hand to attract

his attention and have him turn the canoe toward the bank, where the warrior waited for them.

Now Anne instinctively reached into the bottom of the boat for at least her shift. But she was ignored, as the canoe drove into the shallows and Richard shipped his paddle and jumped over the side.

"Richard," the Indian said, "you have come back. It is good. For times are bad."

"Times?" Richard demanded. "What has happened?"

The Indian looked at Elena, standing up to her thighs in the water as she held the bow of the canoe, staring at him, her face wrinkled with concern.

"It is the *cacique*," the Indian said, still staring at Elena. "He lies sick. Very sick. It is said that he is dying."

They walked up the gentle slopes to the chieftain's hut, Elena leading, Richard at her shoulder, Anne and Andrew bringing up the rear. Anne had found herself unable to face the stares of several hundred people, and had donned her shift, although her feet were bare and her hair was a wild tangle; if the Indians found anything incongruous in her appearance they did not reveal it.

The occasion was too solemn. James Grant had ruled them for more than thirty years, had capitalized on the power his father had established, had made himself secure, and in doing so had made his people secure as well. He might have resented and regretted the fact that the government in Belém and Rio chose to ignore him, so that his dreams of a vast trading concern, a new and powerful offshoot of the Grant Company, perhaps, had never come to pass; the Indians, understanding nothing of what that might entail, knew only that on the Upper Amazon his fame was widespread and his name immortal.

And that now he was dying. They stood in a vast group, men and women and children, gazing at the hut, and at the hammock hanging beneath the troolie-palm roof, and at the men and women gathered there—the great chief's wives and sons and daughters. Now they made way for his youngest child and her husband, the Great Chief's nephew and friend. Hall, the Yorkshireman, and Rorke, the sergeant major, and the other hussars they had left behind, came forward to shake their hands, every face expressing concern at the imminent tragedy, from which their colonel might salvage *some* good.

Richard took his place with Elena beside the hammock and stared at his uncle. James Grant shivered, and his sunburned face had turned yellow; his hands shook and his teeth chattered, although it was near noon. Richard felt like shivering himself; he had used the imaginary illness of this man as a reason for their haste.

But the chieftain's brain remained lucid, for all the tears that flowed from the glare-tortured eyes. "Elena?" he whispered. "But . . ." He turned his head. "Richard? My God, Richard."

Richard held the wasted fingers. "You were right, Uncle James," he said. "Rio was not for us."

"Thank God for that," James said. "Thank God you are back."

"But I must warn you, Uncle James," Richard said, "I return as a criminal. I have deeply offended the king and my family. They will send after me, calling for my arrest. If you would have me leave here and continue up the river, then you have but to say so."

"Have you leave here?" James Grant whispered. "Never. You must never leave here, Richard. You are the hope of my people. As for men coming to arrest you, you will deal with them yourself. I shall not be here. I have a fever, Richard." The fingers tightened. "I have never known such a fever. The women have made up all their potions, and none have had any effect. I am dying, Richard."

"That cannot be," Richard protested. "You are still a young man. You have many years ahead of you. Your people need you."

"They need a great chief," James agreed. "But they also need a man who will guide them. Even while you have been away, white men have come up the river. They are looking for gold, they say. We greeted them as friends, and they went on their way. But they looked at us, at our peace and our women, with greedy eyes, Richard. They will be back, and there will be others. My people need a chieftain who will know when to fight, and when to be friendly, and how to deal with the men from the coast. Thank God you are back."

"I cannot rule your people, Uncle James," Richard said. "I am not one of them. And I am not your son."

Once again the fingers squeezed his. "You are married to my daughter." James turned his head to smile at Elena. "And you have made her happy. I can see that in her face. Do you



not remember what I said to you, the day you left, last year?"

"Yes, but . . ." Richard raised his head, and found himself staring at Zak.

"He knows only Indian ways. You must be guided by him in those ways, Richard." Another half-smile. "I named him after your grandfather. But my people found the *j* too difficult to pronounce. He will stand at your shoulder, Richard. Trust him."

Richard continued to gaze at Zak, at the strange mingling of European and Indian features, the sudden hardening of the mouth.

"No," Zak said. "I am your son, Father, your eldest son. I will be *cacique* when you are dead. What is this man? A relative, no more. He is not one of us. He does not understand our customs. He would interfere with our laws. He is a white man. I say, let us have done with white people."

He looked left and right, to where the hussars stood with their Indian wives.

"No," James Grant said, and pulled himself into a sitting position. "You are wrong, Zak. These men, these white men, are strong. They will give us strong sons and daughters. They will help make a good future for our people." He began to speak in the Indians' language. "Listen to me, all of you. I have chosen Richard Grant as my heir. I require you to honor him and obey him, as you have honored and obeyed me. That way I will know that the future prosperity of you, my children, my people, is assured. Hear me, and obey me."

"No," Zak shouted, also now speaking their language. "That can never be. I am my father's son. I am the *cacique*. It is my word that will be law among us from now on. And my first command is that we should cast out these white intruders, who have made free with our women and now seek to become our masters. Cast them out, I say, and let them die in the forest."

Richard looked at James, but the chieftain had found the effort of sitting up too much for him. Now he had fallen back, his eyes still open, his lips moving as he vainly attempted to speak. Richard looked back at the Indians, murmuring to each other in indecision. Undoubtedly many of them agreed with Zak's point of view, even if an equal number were prepared to accept their chieftain's will. It would be necessary to act the chieftain now, and his first command must be the arrest of Zak. But what then? Could he really order the execution, or the exile, of James's eldest son? Would the Indians accept that?

Yet, to keep him a prisoner here in El Dorado would be to make a mockery of that name, of the peace which was its great attraction.

He gazed at Elena, and found her watching him, gently sucking her lower lip between her teeth as she waited for his decision, but knowing that there was only one decision he could make, if he would survive.

Zak grinned at him. "Well, *Richard*," he said. "My people will follow me, now."

Richard shook his head, walked to the side of the hut, picked up the spear that lay there, and hurled it into the earth in front of his cousin.

"They will follow whichever of us survives," he said.

The Indians gave a great roar of approbation. To them this was the obvious way to settle the dispute.

Anne gave a startled cry, and ran forward. She had not understood much of what had been said, but she could understand what was now about to happen. She clutched Richard's arm. "You are not going to fight?"

"Aye," he said.

"But . . . suppose you are killed?"

"Then I will have failed us all, and you must put your trust in Andrew here."

"But . . ." She bit her lip.

"You'll fight with Indian weapons?" Andrew asked. "You will lose half your advantage."

"I challenged him," Richard pointed out.

"You will win." Elena herself had selected the spear he would use. "But Richard, remember that he is sly, and quick. When you have the advantage, kill him."

"Oh, my God," Anne whispered. "She speaks of her own brother."

"Half-brother," Andrew said gently. "And now her enemy." He drew her aside, and Richard stood by the hammock. But James Grant's eyes were closed, and his breath came in slow gasps. His wives stared at the white man. One of them was Zak's mother.

He stepped into the sunlight. The Indians, including women and children, and the white men, had already taken up a huge circle, leaving the center of the clearing empty. And on the far side Zak waited, his spear held in his right hand, almost as if he intended to throw it.

Richard walked toward him, testing the dust with his bare toes, feeling the noonday sun scorching his flesh. Obviously, fitness would play an important part in a fight at this time of day, and he had just paddled more than a thousand miles—he did not suppose he had ever been stronger. But Zak hunted every day, and was also in the peak of physical condition. Yet he was several years older.

Now Zak also advanced, slowly, his right arm raised almost to the shoulder, holding the spear. Richard was well aware how quickly, and how accurately, an Indian could throw a spear. He held his own in both hands, intending to use it first of all to parry his opponent's attack. The afternoon was suddenly entirely silent, as even the shuffling of feet ceased, and the onlookers waited for the decisive blow.

Zak's right hand moved, and Richard instinctively raised his weapon to deflect the flying wood. But Zak had brought his spear down, held now in both hands, and was thrusting at Richard's exposed stomach, lips drawn back in a wolfish smile. Richard leapt backwards, and the sharpened point whistled by within inches of his belly, urged on its way by his own descending weapon. But Zak held the initiative, brought his spear back, right to left now, while still advancing. Richard tried to duck and caught a blow on the side of the head that knocked him senseless for a second and sent him rolling over and over, losing his weapon in the process.

He heard a shout from the Indians, and forced his dust-clogged eyes open in time to see Zak standing above him and driving the spear point downwards. He rolled again and grasped Zak's spear with both hands as it bit into the earth beside his head. Zak whipped it up, but Richard held on, and got to his feet, so that they stood against each other, hands firm on the spear, staring into each other's eyes.

Now it was a test of sheer musclepower, and Zak realized within seconds that here he was inferior. Slowly Richard began to twist the wooden shaft, exerting all his strength, bringing sweat rolling out of his hair to mingle with the dust coating his shoulder. Zak did his best to push him backwards, and then to draw him forwards, without success. Then without warning he released the spear with one hand, and reached down to close his fingers on Richard's testicles, and squeeze with all of his might.

Richard cried out in pain, and his grasp slackened. Zak tore

the spear from his hands, jumped backwards, and then thrust again, and Richard, through the pain haze welling out of his groin, had to throw himself sideways to avoid the thrust. But as he staggered, his feet touched wood, and he stumbled to his knees and found himself once again holding his own weapon. He was able to bring it up in time for the next thrust, and then scramble to his feet again.

Zak retreated, breathing heavily, his face twisted with impatient anger. All his earlier work had gone for naught. Now it was Richard's turn, and with a quick advance he launched several thrusts at Zak's chest, every one of which was parried with desperate urgency, but every one of which also forced him backwards, and Zak was well aware that to come within reach of the onlookers would be disastrous, as by Indian custom they were obliged to hurl him back into the fray, very probably onto his assailants' advancing spearpoint. A quick glance over his shoulder, and he moved to his left. But Richard followed, once again thrusting at him, and now Zak lost his footing, fell to his hands and knees, made a desperate attempt to roll, lost his balance altogether, and landed on his back, arms flung wide, the spear eluding his fingers.

Richard stood above him, watched the expressions rippling across Zak's face, watched his fingers biting into the earth, securing handfuls of dust. Slowly he sucked air into his lungs, as the spear was brought forward, and the Indians gave a great shout, while Elena uttered a warning cry. Zak's hands came up, hurling the dust into Richard's face, while he thrust down with his feet to propel himself away from danger. But even temporarily blinded, Richard knew where his spear was going. With all the effort at his command he drove the point through Zak's neck, and into the earth beyond.

The women gathered to greet their returning men. Only the males were allowed to take part in the disposal of the dead. James Grant and his son had been carried into the forest, and there laid side by side on a carpet of leaves. Within hours they would be stripped to their skeletons by ants and the birds. After two days, selected warriors would return, led by the new *cacique*, to decide which of their bones would be used for spearheads and knifeblades. Thus the dead would continue to serve the living; proud would be the man whose knife was a relic of the great *cacique*, James Grant.

But it was the new *cacique* who mattered. The women had all bathed; even Anne, he saw, had been encouraged by Elena to discard her shift, surely for the last time, and to take her place with the other women, dripping water from hair and shoulder and thigh, to await the decision of their new master. To be taken by the *cacique* was the greatest mark of honor he could bestow upon any girl, or woman, and they were all available, even those who had mothered children for other men; his choice would be final, as would the order of his choice be final.

The men halted, and waited. Richard walked away from them, among the women, who smiled at him, and moved their bodies to brush against him. But they knew there could be only one choice for a supreme wife. He took Elena's hand, and drew her out of the crowd to stand beside him. The women clapped their hands; the men gave a shout. Thus was their new *cacique* perpetuating the family of the old. With Elena at his side, they could have no fears for their customs.

But there had to be others. He was aware of Anne's stare, of her quickening heartbeat bringing color into her cheeks. To be neglected now would damn her to becoming one of the ordinary women of the tribe, and thus the mistress of any man who might choose her, and there were many, both Indians and white men, looking at her large breasts and long, slender legs.

But there was policy to be considered. Anne was a stranger, more of an intruder than anyone present. To place her next to Elena would be to insult the tribe. He looked over the women, stretched out his hand, and beckoned the youngest of his uncle's wives, a woman named Tulane, perhaps in her middle twenties—it was impossible to be sure—and already twice a mother by James Grant.

This time there was an even greater roar of approbation. In his choice the new chieftain was proving his determination to rule as his uncle had done, to maintain the greatness of the tribe as well as their customs and institutions.

For his third wife Richard selected one of the young girls, also of pure Indian blood, and was once again acclaimed. And now at last he could move toward Anne, and be cheered yet again, as there was no one present who had not known from the start that this was his wish.

"Am I, then, so low in your esteem?" she asked.

She spoke so softly that no one could overhear.

"You know I could not take you first, Anne," he said.

"Yet you will *take* me," she said, "like some chattel. Must I lie on the ground before you, now? A prize gained in battle?"

"I must deal with each of you in turn," he said, "at least at the beginning. You will have some time to prepare yourself. If you do not want me, then I shall honor your decision. But you *must* share my hammock, when the time comes, even if we sleep back to back."

"When the time comes," she said. "And when will that be, my lord and master?"

Her anger would pass. "You will know that," he said. "If you have any sense at all, you will allow yourself to feel for me, as you know you do, and learn to live with these people, as my grandmother did. You will find yourself happier than ever before. For the moment, you must make your own way. I have much to do."

Much to do.

"I plan to send an embassy," Richard said, "to Rio. Uncle James was quite right. We cannot exist forever up here, isolated from the rest of the world. Soon enough the people from the coast will come pushing toward us in ever greater numbers. Of course we can resist them, go to war with them—perhaps even repel them for many years. But in the end, they would win. We must make sure that that never comes to pass. We will negotiate with them now. We will negotiate with the Grant Company, as well, and develop the trade my uncle so wished to see."

"We must have something to offer," Hall said.

"Indeed we must. We now cultivate only for our own needs. But there is much land here; when cleared, it will be as fertile as any in the world."

"It will never support cattle," Rorke said.

"I had not thought of cattle, although I certainly intend to import some for our own use. But it will support coffee, my friends. Coffee is in great demand, far greater demand than the country to the south can supply. Coffee will bring the traders from Rio and Recife and Belém flooding up here."

"And is that what we wish?" asked McLeod, the Scot.

"That is what is going to happen, Alexander," Richard said. "Therefore *we* must make it happen, and control its happening. They will deal with us in Rio. This is Portuguese territory, part

of Brazil. But we control it. I have learned that my friend Bolívar now is called dictator of Venezuela. What if we were to declare the Amazon part of his domain? They dare not risk that."

"But you are an outlaw," Rorke objected.

"We do not know what they have decided to do about that," Richard said. "Obviously, it must be the first duty of my ambassador to discover that. But I am sure we can come to some accommodation with the king, for the very reasons I have outlined."

"I will be your ambassador," Andrew Cullen said.

"You? But if I am outlawed, then so will you be."

"I doubt they will arrest me, if I come as an envoy. And I know what your aims are. Also, I have met your family already. Besides, I am most suited for the task in every way. Certainly I cannot remain here."

He met Richard's gaze, and Richard understood. Alone of them all, Andrew had not chosen a woman or fathered a child. Perhaps his memory of the responsibilities and tragedies of parenthood, learned at Dadanawan, had proved too great. And now there was something else—his long traveling with Anne de Coimbra. He had said not a word, had given no hint of any feeling on the matter, but the way he looked at her was sufficient.

Richard reached out to shake his hand. "Then my ambassador you shall be, and my agent in Rio. We will certainly need you there. Tomorrow we shall get down to making up a list of our proposals." He smiled at his friend. "You will have to memorize it. Be sure to put paper and ink at the head of your list of necessities."

The men got up; Richard waited while Elena interpreted what he proposed to do to the Indian elders, who nodded and voiced their approval. Their increasing contact with the natives further down the river, who had been exposed to the white man's influence for many years, had left them eager to sample some of the apparent benefits of civilization, principally the white man's rum. This would have to be carefully controlled, but Richard did not doubt he could do it. The alternative, that of merely sitting tight until they were eventually overrun, did not appeal to him at all. So he smiled at them in turn, and kissed Elena on the cheek, a ritual they all appreciated, then rose and went up to his own hut, where Anne waited.

Today her moment had arrived. When she had sought to go with the other women into the field that morning, they had giggled, and gently but firmly intimated that she should stay in the *cacique's* hut. He had lain for several nights with each of his other three wives. Now it was time for the fourth.

She had been sitting in her hammock, but she stood as he approached. Since the wives of the chieftain all slept in his house, she had had to live with the various connubial sights and sounds of the previous two weeks, had had to endure, too, her position as the fourth wife, even though she was undoubtedly the oldest of the four. Her position had been alleviated by the obvious and ready friendship of Elena, who had associated her white cousin with everything she had done, and had protected her from the worst of the practical jokes that the other women loved. But it had been obvious that she was waiting for the fulfillment of her role as Richard's mistress and lover, which she both anticipated and dreaded—dreaded because of the lack of privacy that would surround the act.

So now she stood, hands clasped in front of her.

"Andrew has volunteered to go to Rio for us," he said. "To Father and Uncle Anthony, and also to His Majesty." He smiled. "I am attempting to unburn our boats."

"Do you suppose you will succeed?"

He shrugged. "I am no longer acting as an individual, but as the *cacique* of the upper Amazon."

"And do you feel you *need* to unburn our boats?"

"I want to do the best for my people. For this whole region. And for us, too, Anne."

"Us?"

"Do you think I wanted to return you to Henry's prison?"

"I do not think anything. I am in no position to think."

"Will you walk with me into the forest?"

She seemed to catch her breath. "For that, at least, I am grateful, oh mighty chief."

He walked beside her, down the slope to the stream, much as he had walked with Elena several years ago. "Women do not play the shrew in El Dorado," he said. "If they attempt to do so, their husbands beat them."

"Am I, then, being taken into the forest for a beating?"

He waded the stream, heard her splashing behind him. Now the leaves closed around them, and within minutes they were out of sight of the houses.



"I do not believe you are acting the shrew. I believe you are merely frightened, and lonely, and confused."

"A very child," she remarked.

He stopped, and turned. She had to step backwards to avoid bumping into him.

"Yes," he said. "A very child, my Anne. My own dear, delightful Anne. In these surroundings, you are a very child."

A tear escaped her eye. "When you speak like that, you are the boy who asked me to marry him." She sighed. "It is the man who defies men and kings, and even gods, the man who kills, that I fear."

He took her hands and drew her against him. For how many years had he dreamed of holding her naked in his arms? Now the moment was at hand, he felt almost weak with desire. "That man is there to protect you, Anne, along with all these people. Were I not that man, I could have accomplished nothing. You would not be standing here now. But when I am with you, I am that boy again." He kissed her lips; they did not part.

"Are you also that boy with Elena, and Tulane, and Muldi?"

"Does that bother you so much?"

"I was not taught to share." She attempted a smile. "Not even with a great chieftain."

"Yet share you must, my darling Anne. Share, and be sure of my love." Gently he exerted pressure on her shoulders, and she sank to her knees as he sank to his. He held her against him, and kissed her again, and this time her mouth opened for him. "Because I love you," he said. "I will not lie to you. I love Elena, too. The pair of you are everything to me. But in love, my darling, you are my principal wife, now and always."

Her eyes were enormous. "I am afraid," she whispered. "Of not matching them. I know nothing of the Indian way of love." Another half-smile. "I have known nothing of love at all, for a long time. I am afraid."

Gently he laid her on the grass, and lay beside her. "You will never have cause to fear me, Anne. And you I will love the way you wish." He covered her body, and found her lips again. "You I will love," he said.

## Chapter 14

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The majordomo opened the huge double doors leading to the throne room. "Senor William Grant," he said. "Senor Anthony Grant. And Senor Charles Grant."

The three men entered, walked slowly toward the group at the far end of the room, and bowed.

"So this is the young man of whom you spoke," remarked King John. He held out his hand. "I welcome you back to Brazil."

Charles went forward, stooped over the fingers, and with difficulty avoided recoiling; the monarch had apparently not washed his hands since his last meal, when he had most certainly eaten a fowl without benefit of knife or fork.

"Brazil is my home, Your Highness. I have been away too long—eleven years. I am happy to be back."

"And Brazil has need of you, I have no doubt, Senor Grant. We have just concluded a successful war, as you know. Montevideo is in our hands. Yet the war has been long and costly. It is to our trade that we must look now, to restore our prosperity."

"That shall be my first task, Your Highness," Charles agreed.

The king gazed at him for some seconds. "I wish you to meet my son," he said at last. "Don Pedro de Alcántara Bourbon de Braganza."

The prince waited by his father's chair. He was twenty, just

married to the Archduchess Maria Leopoldina of Austria, a princess who had gallantly made the long journey from Europe to this outpost of civilization. And for what, Charles wondered? The prince was already far too stout, and the little moustache he wore could hardly hide the unfortunate combination of weakness and arrogance that hovered around his mouth, while of his lechery Charles had already heard too many tales.

Yet he was the future king of Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves.

"I am honored, Your Highness," he said and shook hands.

"You may have heard, Senor Grant," King John said, "that I shall soon be returning to Portugal. The discussions are almost complete. Discussions," he reflected, his lips twisting. "That is the legacy left to us all, my friend, by Bonapartism—that a king should have to *discuss* with his people whether he shall return to his heritage or no. But no matter. I will return. I have it in mind to leave Don Pedro here in Brazil as my regent. He has grown up here, and he knows and loves the country and its people. Yet he will need advice. I know that your father and your uncle, and others, will be ready to provide this; but I know too that a young man needs to lean upon men of his own age, or at least his own generation. I wish you to be my son's friend."

"I am flattered, and eager to earn that honor, Your Majesty," Charles said.

Once again King John gazed at him for some seconds. "Good," he said. He glanced at William Grant. "I know you will take it as no reflection upon yourself, Senor Grant, as I do not intend it as a reflection upon myself, to be sure; but it is inevitable that in the course of time we shall both pass away, and our empires—yours in the world of commerce, and mine over the minds and bodies of my people—will pass to our children and nephews. In Don Pedro here, and in the young Senor Grant, we may view the approaching years with confidence. Do you not agree?"

"Wholeheartedly, Your Highness."

"Good. Good. We are well aware of the importance of the Grant Company and its ships to the prosperity of Brazil."

"You will bring Senora Grant to my palace for dinner, Senor Grant," Don Pedro said. "My wife will be pleased to make her acquaintance, and to hear from you both about the United States." He smiled.

Charles bowed. "It will be my greatest pleasure, Your Highness." Turning to the king he said, "May I ask a question, Your Majesty?"

"Ask me anything you wish, senor."

"May I ask when you will issue a warrant for the arrest of my cousin, who has so flagrantly defied Your Majesty's rule?"

William Grant coughed nervously, and the king frowned. "Your cousin? Is he, then, also an enemy of yours?"

"I too, sir, am conscious of the part my uncle's company has to play in the life of Brazil. A company in the position of ours cannot afford to be suspected of protecting or even condoning criminals, even if they are of the closest blood ties."

"Well said, senor," the king agreed. "But I consider that your uncle has done enough, in disinheriting his own son, to prove to the world, and certainly to me, that the Grant Company stands for law and order. Besides, I am told that your cousin and his paramour have disappeared into the forest. This was nearly a year ago, and nothing has been heard of them since. They could well be dead."

"I doubt that, Your Highness. My cousin, by all accounts, knows the forest well, and he had an Indian woman to assist him."

"He is dead to us, Senor Grant, and I would have him dead to you also. Forget him. Forget the past. Concern yourself with the future of the Grant Company, and of Brazil."

"That was unworthy of you," Anthony Grant admonished his son mildly, as they entered the Grant Company office. "Richard is not your concern, as His Majesty said. He is dead. And that foolish young woman is also dead."

"It is easy for you to say, Father," Charles pointed out. "But I would ask you this, sir." He looked at his uncle. "If he is not dead, but lurking somewhere in the Matto Grosso with his uncle and that mestizo crew, will he not *become* my problem, one day?"

William Grant opened the door to the inner office, and gestured the clerks away. "It was my decision to recall you, Charles," he said. "To do that, to make you an officer of the company, it was necessary to set aside my father's will. This I have done, with the aid and support of His Majesty. Richard can never be a problem to you. You are heir to the company, wherever it trades in the world. Moreover, it is your father's

and my desire that you assume your duties as quickly as possible. We are both past fifty, and we have had trials and tribulations enough. The company is going through a difficult time. No doubt the entire world is going through a difficult time. It is the aftermath of twenty years of war. There is no money anymore. People are not buying. And therefore they have no need for ships to transport goods. Your father and I know this will pass, but we feel that in present circumstances there should be a young, strong mind in control of company policy, and in Boston you have proved yourself more than capable. You have my word that the Grant Company is yours, that Richard will never have any rights against you."

Charles gazed into his uncle's eyes. "Then am I content, uncle," he said. "What is my first task?"

William Grant smiled, and clapped him on the shoulder. "Why, Charles, I would have you share our duties, here and now. There are three desks in this room. That one is yours."

"And my prerogatives?" Charles asked softly.

"Prerogatives?" William looked at Anthony.

"I can only give of my best, Uncle William, when I know where my efforts must be directed. Am I to sit here in an advisory or an executive capacity? Do I give instructions, or do I suggest to you that such-and-such instructions shall be given?"

"Why . . ." William pulled his nose. "We had not considered an exact division of authority, but . . ." Once again he glanced at Anthony. "You have executive authority, Charles. It would be pointless to bring you all the way back here and then deny that. You act in our name, and can be sure of our support, in whatever you think necessary."

"Then I shall not fail you."

His personality, his confidence, seemed to fill the room. The two older men gazed at each other for a third time. Perhaps, for too long, they had been dominated by the awesome figure of their father. Or perhaps here was an entirely new breed of man, post-revolutionary and post-Napoleonic man, where their roots had been too firmly set in the archaic past. But suddenly they both felt as if all their problems were ended, by his mere presence.

"I instructed Moreno to put out the books for you," Anthony told his son eagerly.

Charles nodded, and sat down. "Certainly that is the place

to begin," he said, and opened the first ledger, turning the pages rapidly, yet allowing himself time to glance down the various columns, while his uncle and his father hovered at his elbow, as if they were the clerks and he the master.

"At least part of our problem," he said, "seems to be that we are acting the banker."

William Grant sighed. "It is the inevitable result of the trade recession, I am afraid. These planters and ranchers who owe us such vast sums—well, they must live; they must import, in order to *export*."

"So we bring whatever goods they require into Brazil," Charles observed, "and ship their produce out, and when their produce does not fetch enough to pay their costs, we add it to their debt."

"Why, yes," Anthony Grant said. "That is how it has always been."

"So that there can hardly be a planter in Brazil who does not owe us at least half his estate," Charles said.

"Well... these things fluctuate," William explained. "We are presently at the bottom of a cycle, so the debt is very high. When things improve, the debt will be reduced. We charge interest, of course."

"Two percent," Charles said. "And *that* is merely added to the debt as well. I had not realized that the Grant Company was a charitable institution."

"Such is not our intention," Anthony said. "But what can we do? There is simply not the money in circulation to meet these debts."

"And we are secured," William said. "The land—"

"Is worthless to us, in the hands of the planters," Charles said.

"It would be equally worthless in our hands," William said, "quite apart from the social and legal problems attached to foreclosure."

"It may be worthless now, Uncle. But I doubt it will be worthless in the years to come. Shipping is necessarily a high-risk business. One of the first steps I would recommend to you would be an expansion into cattle and cane and coffee."

"We already have a plantation," Anthony said.

"A plantation," Charles said contemptuously. "According to these figures, we are virtually owners of at least a dozen plantations. I think it would be best for the firm to be owners in fact as well as on paper."

"Those people are our friends," Anthony protested.

"Father, if there is one thing I learned in Boston, it is that there can be no friends in business. Business is a matter of profit and loss, of success and failure. These people have failed. We have succeeded. It is a business law, just as it is a natural law, that the weakest succumb, and the strongest survive. I am not suggesting we turn these friends of yours out into the street to starve. If we take over their plantations, we shall certainly need capable tenants to operate them for us. But the land, the cattle and the cane and the coffee, will be ours."

William shook his head. "I don't know. I really don't know. It would cause a great deal of adverse comment."

"Is that important?"

"This is a small community," Anthony said. "Everyone in it depends on everyone else. We are shipowners. That is accepted. If we now start to force our way into the cattle-ranching and cane-growing business, why, we will make ourselves very unpopular, especially if it is done by means of mortgage foreclosures."

Charles leaned back in his seat. "You brought me back here, Father . . . Uncle William, because you say you feel the Grant Company needs a strong, new approach, because things are not going well. I am prepared to give the company what you consider it needs. But I cannot do so if I am to be hampered by outmoded sentiments, by fears of popular disapproval." He closed the ledger and stood up. "You promised me executive authority. If I cannot have that, you had best send me back to Boston."

They stared at him in consternation.

"Of course we shall not do that," William said. "But the step you propose is a vast one, and contrary to all past company policy. We shall have to consider, to discuss . . ."

"We have considered, Uncle. We have discussed. I see a company that is being dragged down by the incompetence and inefficiency of others, and—" He smiled at them. "—by the generosity of its own policies. Those planters will succumb anyway. Is it not right that we, who have helped them so much for so long, should inherit their lands, and secure our own future? We must look to expansion, rather than stagnation." He stood between them, and put his arm around each man's shoulders. "You have nothing to fear. Simply let people know that Grant Company policy having to do with financing our customers is now in my hands. That way all the opprobrium

will fall on me." He squeezed them against him. "And that way, our future will be secured."

"And how is my boy today?" Charles Grant tousled his son's carefully combed hair. Miss Pringle, watching from nearby, tightened her lips.

"I saw black people with no clothes on today," Bayley confided once he had caught his breath. "Mary wouldn't let me look. She said they were indecent."

"Well . . ." Charles stooped to kiss Bayley's sister, Edith. "I'm afraid it is something you will have to get used to, Mary. This isn't Boston."

"You can say that again, Mr. Grant." Mary Pringle was in her forties, and had been a Harrington housemaid before following her mistress into her new life. "I'm not sure I like it at all."

"It is the heat, you understand," Charles explained, "which drives the natives into all manner of peculiar customs. It affects Europeans as well, from time to time." He winked. "Before you know it, Mary, you'll have whipped off your drawers and be running around without a skirt."

"Mr. Grant!" Mary hastily gathered both children to her side. "Come along, children."

"You really should not tease her so." Joanna stood at the foot of the stairs, waiting for him. "She is finding it very difficult."

She had become quite a changed character since Berkeley Carew's suicide, which had happened before they'd left Boston. Since then, she had seemed to regard her husband with new respect. Though she could not possibly know, or even suspect, that he had had anything to do with that tragedy, it was clear she had finally realized that some men are born to success, and others to failure, and that she was grateful to be married to one of the successes.

That he *had* been responsible for Carew's suicide was a source of immense, secret satisfaction to him. It gave him a feeling of almost supernatural mastery over his rivals and enemies. And Joanna's surrender was a delight. It had made it quite unnecessary for him to consider discovering the whereabouts of someone like Magdalena, supposing she had not died of syphilis by now. But in fact he had no desire to look up any of his old friends or acquaintances in Rio. They would remem-



ber an uncertain young man who no longer existed.

He put his arm round her waist as they climbed the stairs. "And do you find it as difficult as Mary does? Have you been watching a lot of naked black men?"

"I have been trying not to. I have been taking tea with your Aunt Célestine. A formidable lady."

"The only *man* in that half of the family, if you ask me," Charles said, and opened their bedroom door.

Joanna preferred not to comment. She stood at the window, which looked along the sweep of the road at the Grant mansion, half a mile away, and to the plantation stretching behind. "Everything here is on such a huge scale," she said. "There seems so much room."

"There aren't enough people, and that's a fact." He sat down and lit a cheroot. "But I'd like *your* impressions of Brazil. You've been here a week."

"Well—Oh, Lord, what's that?" She pressed herself against the wall.

Charles sat up, and watched the procession slowly making its way across the floor.

"That, my love, is a dead cockroach, being removed by ants. His corpse will provide them with food for the next two days."

"But . . . shouldn't we do something about it?"

"There's not much point."

"And everyone goes barefoot," she complained, daintily stepping over the funeral party with her own tightly laced boots. "The servants are even suggesting the children should go barefoot. Suppose they stepped on one of those creatures?"

"The creature, as you call it, would die, with a terrible crunching sound, and the ants would be pleased."

"Oh, you . . . you make fun of everything." She sat on the bed, and glanced at him. "At least, you have begun to lately. I have never known such a change come over a man, since you learned you were returning here."

"Well, it is what I have always wanted, only Richard stood in my way. But fate always finds us out, one way or the other. Now I am happy. And I propose to go on being happy. I want you to be happy, too. Tell me what you think of Brazil so far."

"Well . . ." she said cautiously, "I suppose I will get used to the heat and the bugs."

"I should think so."

"And . . . I suppose I'll make friends."

"I'm sure you will. We will have a reception, and introduce you to everyone. I will speak to Aunt Célestine about it."

"Yes," she said doubtfully. "I was talking with her about . . . things to do. There doesn't seem to be much. That art museum, there's not much to it. There's no play currently at the theater, and she tells me there hasn't been one for months. And Charles, one of the servants told me they don't even have balls or dances here. She said only the black people dance."

"Why, I suppose she's right. It would be quite incredible for any Brazilian matron to permit her daughter to attend a public affair where they might meet *anybody*. Why, most Brazilian girls aren't allowed off their plantations. They don't even go to mass. Their chaplains celebrate it in their private chapels. People have parties, of course, but nothing like the huge balls you have in Boston."

"They were such fun."

"You'll have to set a new fashion. Has that put you off?"

"Of course not. But Rio is, well . . . it's awfully dirty. And there doesn't seem any proper sanitation in the streets."

"There isn't, really. That's something to plan for."

"But the people seem very friendly," she said brightly. "I received a letter today from a princess de Coimbra. That sounds awfully grand. Is it?"

"Filly? Well, she *is* a princess, I suppose."

"She has invited me to visit her. It seems she has a plantation just outside of town. She doesn't mention a husband."

"She doesn't have a husband. Why do you suppose Cousin Richard is now an outlaw? He was betrothed to her, and then ran off with her brother's wife. Can you imagine anything more scandalous?"

"My God," Joanna said. "He must be quite shameless."

"I have told you so often enough." Charles kicked off his boots, and began to unbutton his shirt. Joanna watched him with apprehension. Since their departure from Boston, and the all-embracing protection of her father and mother, he had become a most demanding lover, entirely unlike the rather uncertain young man she had married. Now he required things of her she had never expected to have to provide, and occasionally, now, he hurt her, in his desire to use all her body instead of just those portions ordained by God and nature for a husband's entry. She did not enjoy it in the least.

Yet it had to be endured; whenever she revealed any reluctance, he became angry. Isolated as she was, in *his* world, it was important to keep him happy.

"But I don't think it would be a good idea for you to visit her."

"Why not?"

"Mainly because I say so, my love. But if you must know, Filly's reputation is . . . how shall I put it? Ruined?"

"By your cousin?"

"Not entirely. By her own habits. No, no, you must stay away from Filly."

"Well . . . if you say I must." She sighed. "Did you have a successful meeting with the king?"

"Things are working out even better than I had hoped." Naked, awaiting her embrace, he stood before her where she sat on the bed. She sighed, put her arms around his waist, hugged him against her, felt him rise against her throat as she kissed his navel. "I promise you this, my love. Within a year I will control the Grant Company absolutely. And once I have done that, and once the king returns to Portugal, I shall control the regent as well. He has invited us to dine."

She leaned back to look at him. "You did not tell me!"

He chuckled her under the chin. "I thought you disapproved of royalty."

"Well . . ." She flushed. "If we are to live here, we must accept the royal family as the leaders of society. To dinner? Oh, when?"

"Tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night? Oh, my God. My gowns are all still hopelessly crushed. Oh, what am I to do?"

"Have one pressed by the maids. You will look delightful. And I am anxious for you to be friends with his princess, just as I am going to be friends with Prince Pedro. When his father returns to Portugal, he will turn more and more to me. I can see it happening. And when I have the prince of Alcántara in my pocket . . ."

She stared at him, her eyes wide. "What then?"

He leaned forward to kiss her on the nose. "The world, my love. Or at least Brazil. Now take off your clothes. I am on fire."

"You frighten me," she said, as she got up to undress. "I hope and pray you know where you are going."

"To the very top, Joanna, my love. And you are going with me."

Moreno, the chief clerk, stood just inside the doorway, twisting his hands together. Like almost everyone else in Rio and the surrounding countryside, he had become bitterly aware, during the past months, that his circumstances had changed. For years he had entered this office as he chose. He was an old man now, and had been one of the Grant Company's first employees, sixty years before. He could remember the first manager, that mountain of a man, Arthur Conybeare, just as he could remember the terrible day when Jamey Grant had murdered Conybeare and stolen away with Jack Grant's wife. He had always addressed the two sons as Senor William and Senor Anthony, had discussed business matters with them, offered his advice, played to the full the part offered to him because of his experience in Brazilian affairs and the generous friendship of his employees.

But this young man was something different. No Senor Charles, here.

Now Charles Grant raised his head from the columns of figures over which he was poring. "Yes?"

"Moreno glanced from left to right. The office was empty, except for Senor Grant and his clerk, the American Cheyney. This was another disturbing sign of the times. No one knew what was going on anymore; Charles Grant confided only in this lean-faced shadow of his, and only Cheyney addressed him by his first name. Senor William and Senor Anthony seldom came into town anymore. They claimed it was not necessary, as Charles was capable of running the entire business, and indeed that it was essential for him to have full responsibility—under their guidance, of course. But Moreno and the other clerks knew better; the two senior partners could not bear to witness the constant stream of supplicants, men they had often known since boyhood, and supported since boyhood, who over the past few months had suddenly received demands for payment in full of their debt to the company, under threat of foreclosure. Senor William and Senor Anthony could only point to Charles, and explain that he was now in sole charge of the company's financial policy—and then flee the office rather than watch as Charles, smiling and charming, explained to the confounded planter that the letter meant exactly what it said;

if payment was not received by the first day of the following month, application would be made to the courts for a transfer of title. Far better for the elder Grants not to come in at all, than to endure such scenes, day after day.

The clerks had no choice but to endure it.

"There is a gentleman to speak with you, Senor Grant," Moreno said.

Charles leaned back. "Well, bring me his file, and then show him in."

"He is not a rancher, senor, nor a planter. He is, I think, a back woodsman."

Charles frowned at him, and glanced at Cheyney. "And he claims to have business with the company?"

"With you, senor. He claims to have come from Senor Richard Grant."

Charles sat up straight. "Is he armed?"

"Yes, senor."

"Well, see that he is relieved of his weapons, and then show him in."

Moreno bowed and withdrew.

"Is it wise to see him?" Cheyney asked.

"It will be interesting, at least," Charles said.

"Yes, but . . ."

"Do you fear he is an assassin?" Charles smiled. "Not my cousin's way, Cheyney. But be prepared."

The door opened again, and Andrew Cullen came in. Certainly he looked like a backwoodsman, in his calico trousers, his striped poncho, and his straw hat, which he now removed. And he was a very big man.

"Well?" Charles asked. "I am told you come from my cousin. We had thought him dead."

"My name is Andrew Cullen. Perhaps you have heard of me."

"Cullen?" Charles frowned.

"This is the man who helped your cousin abduct the princess of Coimbra," Cheyney said, producing his pistol from the drawer.

"I assisted Colonel Grant in helping the Princess to escape her imprisonment," Andrew said. He did not seem alarmed at the sight of the pistol.

"And you can therefore give me a single reason why I should not hand you over to a judge for hanging?" Charles inquired.

"Because it would be to your profit to hear me, at least," Andrew said.

"Well?"

"Tell your hireling to put away his artillery."

Charles glanced at Cheyney, who flushed angrily, but returned the pistol to its drawer.

Andrew selected a chair, and sat down. Charles chewed his lip. The fellow's effrontery was unbearable.

"Quickly," he said. "I am a busy man."

"I'm sure you are," Andrew agreed, looking around himself, and slowly taking a cheroot from the pocket of his poncho, biting the end, and striking a match. "You should know, Mr. Grant, that your uncle, James Grant, *cacique* of the Upper Amazon, has died of a fever, and that by his wish, your cousin, Richard Grant, has succeeded to his titles and prerogatives. This has been accepted by all the tribes, and has been sanctified by combat."

"Richard is chief of all the tribes?"

Andrew nodded. "And as such is probably the most powerful man in northern Brazil."

"Bah," Charles said. "I have read Grandmother Kita's book. This great empire is nothing but a collection of mud huts and naked savages. Does my cousin also go naked, and his paramour?"

"They have adopted Indian ways, naturally," Andrew said. "And you would be gravely wrong to belittle him. If the Amazon country is the northern bastion of Brazil, then he is the bastion of the Amazon country. He is also a good friend of General Bolívar, the dictator of Venezuela."

Charles leaned forward. "So—Richard is threatening to add treason to his crimes. We shall see what he says when a regiment of soldiers arrives on his doorstep."

Andrew smiled. "A mere regiment? Your cousin has at his disposal several hundred warriors, inured to fever and jungle conditions, and led by European officers, men who learned their trade against Monteverde in Venezuela."

Charles stared at him. "Have you come to deliver a declaration of war?"

"By no means. I merely seek to point out that Richard Grant is no fugitive, but a great chieftain—with whom you may do business, to your mutual profit."

"Business? What has he to offer me?"

"A vast virgin territory, waiting to be opened. He will grow coffee and raise cattle, and the Grant Company will be the carriers. The company will also benefit from any gold or diamonds discovered in the area; the Indians have no need for precious stones. What your cousin seeks in exchange are schools to educate his people, the benefits of civilization. He wishes to make the Upper Amazon an integral part of Brazil, rather than have it remain a no-man's-land between Venezuela and the south. He offers you peace and friendship—and, as I said, mutual profit."

Charles continued to regard him for some seconds. "Why should my cousin offer to trade with me?" he asked at last. "He has no love for me. And now I sit where he should be sitting."

"He does not see it that way, Mr. Grant," Andrew said. "He is content in El Dorado."

"With his naked women."

"If it amuses you to consider that, then do so," Andrew said evenly.

Charles had the grace to flush. "Whatever I consider is of little importance. You are speaking as if I were the government, able to erase the charges against him."

"I am sure the government will give serious consideration to your recommendations," Andrew said.

"Hm. And suppose the return of the princess of Coimbra is demanded as a condition of any business done with your master?"

Andrew ignored the implied insult. "Then negotiations will end, since your cousin has already taken the lady as his wife."

"How can he do that, when she is already married?"

"He is obeying Indian rather than Portuguese law."

"My God! And this is the man who wants to do business with me as an equal?"

Andrew stood up. "If that is your attitude, Mr. Grant, there is nothing more to be said. History will undoubtedly record you as the man who lost the Upper Amazon for Brazil."

"Not so fast," Charles said. "Don't you realize I could have you arrested?"

"That is up to you."

"And hanged?"

Andrew shrugged. "I knew the risk I was taking. But you can be sure that if I do not return to your cousin by the end of a year, he will open negotiations with General Bolívar. There

can be only one outcome to those negotiations."

"You are a bold man, Mr. Cullen," Charles said. "Are all my cousin's European officers of your stamp?"

"They will follow him to the ends of the earth, if that is what you mean." Andrew smiled. "They have already done so, once."

"Hm," Charles said. "Have you any decent clothes, Mr. Cullen?"

"I have, Mr. Grant. Better than these, anyway."

"Good. I want you to come to dinner with me this evening. I think we may well be able to come to some sort of an agreement, which I would be happy to put to the government. Besides, it will be a treat for my wife to be able to spend an evening speaking English."

Cheyney did not speak until he had closed the door behind the Englishman. Then he leaned against it. "Do you know what you're doing, Mr. Charles?"

Charles smiled at him. "Know your enemy, Cheyney," he said. "It is a sound precept."

"Some trees stretch a hundred, two hundred feet into the air," Andrew said.

"I find that difficult to believe, Mr. Cullen." Joanna poured coffee. She had never known a meal pass so quickly, or so pleasantly, despite Charles's recurrent efforts at sarcastic comment. Andrew was a fascinating raconteur.

"Have you never ventured into the great forests of North America, Mrs. Grant?"

"Good Lord, no."

"Ah. Well, it is a search for light, you see. There is no room to reach sideways, so the trees must go up, and up, and up."

"Fascinating," Charles observed, offering cheroots. "Now tell us about these naked women."

"Charles!" Joanna remonstrated.

"Why, my dear, didn't you know? They do not wear clothes on the Upper Amazon. Men and women, boys and girls, grey-beards and toothless old hags, all spend their time as naked as the day they were born. Why, I'll wager you strip off the moment you pass Belém, Cullen."

"Clothes, Mr. Grant, are completely unnecessary in the Matto Grosso. It is extremely hot there. We live virtually on



the Equator. There is no cold season, and even the nights are warm. We have only the rain to contend with, and clothes are useless against rain, while to wear damp clothing is to risk a chill. Then again, clothes snag on branches and bushes, and they are a perfect place of concealment for ticks and lice. So we discard them."

"Good heavens," Joanna remarked. "And there is not . . . well . . ."

"Embarrassment, Mrs. Grant? Why should there be? It is the unusual, the unique, that is embarrassing."

"Yes, but . . ." She flushed, and glanced at her husband.

"My wife is wondering," Charles explained, "if, where there is such open lasciviousness, there is not also open immorality. And there is, however the Indians attempt to pretend there isn't. You have read my grandmother's book, my dear."

"I . . . I had supposed it was fiction," Joanna murmured.

"Far from it. On the Upper Amazon, men and women couple as they choose, and they choose very often, by Grandmother Kita's account. I find it quite incredible to imagine Anne de Coimbra running around naked, sleeping with every man who fancies her."

"I think I should withdraw," Joanna said, getting up.

"Oh, sit down, my dear," Charles commanded. "These are the people Mr. Cullen would have us trade with. We must learn about them."

"The princess de Coimbra is now the wife of the *cacique*," Andrew said, "as I have told you. The wives of the *cacique* are reserved for him alone."

"The wives?" Charles said. "No wonder Richard is perfectly happy never to return to Rio. Well, Cullen, I will most certainly put your proposition to His Majesty and his ministers, as well as to my uncle and my father. I will tell you frankly that it attracts me. I am perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones, and if it will benefit the colony, I am sure I can persuade those in authority to agree with me. Who knows, I may even pay you a visit myself one of these days, to sample your dusky paradise." He winked. "I shall leave my wife behind, of course. Although, my love . . ."

He smiled at Joanna. "I imagine you would make a splendid figure, flitting through the leaves in the altogether."

Joanna stood up again. "I am very tired," she said. "So you really will have to excuse me. It has been a pleasure, Mr.

Cullen. I am sure we will meet again, here in Rio." She forced a smile. "I have no intention of venturing up the Amazon."

He kissed her fingers. "You have been too kind, Mrs. Grant. I apologize if our talk has caused you any embarrassment."

"On the contrary. I found it fascinating." But she was more angry than she had allowed herself to become in a long while.

"I suppose you find it delightful to humiliate me in front of strangers," she said to Charles, when he eventually came up to the bedchamber.

"Humiliate you? My dear, one can only humiliate oneself, by adopting ridiculous attitudes. I wanted you to know what these people are like, to know just how low my cousin has sunk. Had I merely told you, in the privacy of this room, you would never have believed me."

"Yet you are content to do business with these savages. I believe you would do business with the devil in hell, if you could see a profit."

He smiled, and sat on the bed to kiss her on the forehead. "You are such a simple soul, Joanna. Perhaps that is what I love about you. Why should I not do business with them, for a while? Cullen spoke very good sense. These people are all but impregnable, at the moment. My grandfather led a powerful and well-armed expedition up the Amazon in 1783, three ships and more than a hundred men, seeking his brother and his kidnapped wife. And Jamey Grant possessed no more than a few Indian braves, and his own brains. *He* had no white mercenaries at his back. Yet that expedition cost Grandfather Jack two ships, and at the end of it, for all Jamey's crimes, he was confirmed as governor of the Upper Amazon. Now by Cullen's accounts, Richard is a far more experienced soldier than Jamey ever was, and has waged several campaigns in the forest. It would take a larger army than even King John commands to dislodge him. But that is not to say that he can *never* be dislodged. He is in the process of digging his own grave at this very moment. He wishes to trade with me. Well, I shall trade with him." He got up to look out of the window at the night, at the rollers drifting in to Copacabana beach. "I shall trade with him until one day he comes out of that jungle of his. And when that day comes, I will have a gallows already built. We will trade him all the way to a noose."

"But . . . why?" she asked. "Why can't you bury whatever hatchet there is between you?"

He turned to smile at her. "Because he is Richard Grant. William's son. While he lives, disinherited or not, he is the Grant heir."

With a tremendous fanfare of trumpets, the royal carriage came to a halt. Brilliantly uniformed majordomos hurried forward to open the doors, and assist the king and queen and their sons to the ground.

The dockside was packed. Joanna Grant did not suppose there could be a single inhabitant of Rio who was not here today. The kaleidoscope varied from the officers of the court and the garrison, a mass of plumes and medals and gold braid, to their ladies, in their finest silks and satins, dripping with jewels, then the planters, in their best broadcloth suits and tall hats, cravats clinging soggly to sweat-dampened necks, and *their* ladies, also a flutter of fine fabrics; judging by the obesity of the latter, and the way they blinked in the morning sunlight, Joanna could well believe her husband's tale that they seldom left the security of their houses. Then there were the overseers and the clerks, and their families, whose well-worn calico and linen was washed and pressed to its ultimate smartness, and lastly the slaves and the Indians. These, in honor of the great day, smelled of coconut oil and lard, with which they had smoothed and brushed their hair, and sported odd treasured garments, hand-me-downs from their masters and mistresses, which might be a brightly striped vest, worn over a pair of cotton drawers, or an equally splendid parasol, raised over a woman in a scanty shift.

The concourse shifted restlessly, and whispered incessantly, and sweated through their pomades and perfumes; a quick sickening variety of odors filled the still air. And they boiled. Joanna, in a deep-blue silk gown with a matching bonnet and parasol, could feel perspiration trickling down her shoulders and legs, and her hair seemed an enormous weight pressing on the top of her head. And there was no immediate relief in sight, for although the boats waited, and the ships at anchor in the bay had already taken in their second cables, a dais had been erected by the dock, and to this the royal party slowly made its way. King John smiled and nodded at his subjects, while his queen remained stony-faced. Prince Pedro stroked his little moustache and raised his eyebrows to his special cronies and his latest amours. His younger brother, Prince Miguel, looked

as sullen as his mother, and the Princess Maria Leopoldina, so advanced in her pregnancy that she should not really be appearing in public at all, regarded the world with the vapid smile that Joanna had never seen her lose, whatever the circumstances.

"My people!" King John looked out over the concourse. "Today, the twenty-sixth of April, 1821, is the saddest day of my life. Today I leave you, after thirteen long years. Thirteen happy years. Thirteen has not proved an unlucky number for me, and I know it has not proved unlucky for you. I look back on my sojourn here with great affection, and some pride. I recall our victories over La Plata, which have added the Cisplatine Province to our empire. I look around me at this great city of ours, at the many new, splendid buildings that have arisen during these last ten years, and I know that Brazil possesses the finest city in all South America. I turn my back on these things with a heavy heart. But do not suppose I shall forget you. I have made Brazil an integral part of my kingdom, and so it shall remain. Although I am called upon to resume my leadership of all the Portuguese people, to take my place upon that European stage which is the center of all civilization, yet my mind shall oft return to these sunny climes. As you know, I am leaving with you my eldest son, Don Pedro de Alcántara, both as my representative and as your regent. I know you will yield to him the same loyalty you have always shown to me. I know that he loves you as I do. People of Brazil, I give you Don Pedro de Alcántara, and Princess Maria Leopoldina."

The crowd cheered politely. There could hardly be anyone present who did not know that their monarch was heartily glad to be leaving the heat and the vulgarities of colonial life for the luxury of his Lisbon palace, just as there could hardly be anyone present who was not heartily pleased to be seeing him go, along with his government departments and his tax gatherers. The only regret felt by the Brazilians, Joanna guessed, was that *any* member of the royal family should have to remain.

Or was she being terribly disloyal to her new people? She looked right and left as the royal party began their descent from the dais and people hurried forward to bid them farewell, and discovered that Andrew Cullen was standing only a few feet away from her.

"Mrs. Grant." He raised his hat.

She had not seen him since he had come to dinner, although she knew that he had been conducting a great deal of business with Charles. Business that was intended to entrap his friend, Richard Grant. And perhaps himself. She caught her breath. "Mr. Cullen."

"I did not mean to embarrass you," he said, and she realized that she was flushing. "It seems to be my misfortune to do so, whenever we meet."

"It is not that at all," she said. "I . . ." She bit her lip. "I trust your negotiations with my husband go well?"

"Indeed they do. The sentences against both Richard Grant and me have been suspended, and preparations are already underway for a trading vessel to come up the Amazon." He smiled at her. "I have even been conferring with the bishop, who is eager to send us a mission. This I will have to discuss with Richard, but if it is a necessary part of the civilization process, and the eventual unification of Brazil, then I am sure he will agree to it. I count my visit here a success. A new day, perhaps, for Brazil."

She gazed at him. She had met him only once before. She had never met Richard Grant at all, and by all accounts he was a most unpleasant man. But could he possibly be more unpleasant than her own husband? Not if he had inspired such loyalty in this large, friendly, utterly open Englishman.

Andrew frowned at her. "By your expression, Mrs. Grant, I would suppose you do not agree with me."

"Your sentence has been *suspended*, Mr. Cullen? Not waived altogether?"

"Well, that will follow. Your husband, and the government here, naturally view our overtures with some reservations. We are on probation, I suspect."

She looked past him; Charles was hurrying toward her to escort her over to say farewell to the king. "A probation that may never end, Mr. Cullen," she said softly, except to your disadvantage. Tell your Mr. Grant that he must *never* return to Rio. Remember that, I beg of you, for all your sakes." She held out her hand and raised her voice. "I wish you a safe return to El Dorado, Mr. Cullen." She smiled at Charles. "Do please call again, when next you are in Rio."

## Chapter 15

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"Andrew has been sighted, ten minutes downriver," Rorke said.

"Thank God for that." Richard leapt out of his hammock.

"I was beginning to worry."

"About Andrew?" Rorke grinned. "Surely he has nothing to fear from those shallow cousins and uncles you left behind in Rio."

"Maybe. Maybe I was thinking more of these intruders we seem to have accumulated."

"We have seen only one set of tracks," Rorke pointed out.

"I'll be happier when he's taken," Richard said. "I don't like strange tracks in my territory. And one man behind a tree with a bow can bring anyone down." He went toward the river, where the women were bathing. "Andrew is home."

"Andrew!" Anne stepped out of the water, tossing her hair from her eyes. Her life in the forest had done wonders for her; it was quite impossible to suppose that this tall, strong, brown-skinned woman was over thirty years old. Only in her failure to conceive a child could there be any regret between them.

But he supposed this had its compensations. Muldi already had a babe at her breast, and had been more a mother than a wife for several months, while both Tulane and Elena were in the last stages of pregnancy. Even now he found it difficult to reconcile this slow-moving, ponderous girl with the enormous swollen belly with the wood nymph he had loved for so long. Yet Elena was utterly happy, secure in the knowledge that her

son would be the next *cacique*, and securely confident that her child would be a son.

But for the past four months, Anne had been his only love partner. Now she fell in beside him, matching him long stride for long stride, as they hurried with the warriors and the white men and their women to greet their ambassador.

"Richard." Andrew shook hands. "Rorke. Hall. Anne." He hesitated, then kissed her on the cheek, his hands on her arms.

"You have the look of a successful man," Richard said.

"I consider myself so. Up to a point." He fetched a satchel from the bottom of the canoe. "Papers. Warrants. Documents. There should be a ship upriver in a few months."

"With coffee?" Richard asked.

"Enough to sow half this forest."

"And cattle?" Rorke asked.

"A bull and four heifers. It will be a start."

"And chickens?" Hall demanded. "My God, what would I give for a real egg."

"Hens and roosters."

"And dogs?" Anne asked. "I would love to have a dog."

"Those too. Best-bred mastiffs."

"Well, then, you *have* done well." Richard threw his arm around his friend's shoulders and walked with him up the slope.

"You saw my father?"

"Briefly. I saw your cousin."

Richard stopped, turned to face him. "Charles? They *did* bring him back, then."

"Aye. And more than that. He is now running the Grant Company. Your father is still president, but he and your uncle take little part in the day-to-day running of the business."

"My God. And it was with Charles you negotiated?"

"It was."

"And *he* has agreed to trade with me?"

"After some thought. Richard—"

"Did you see Prince Henry?" Anne asked quietly.

"Only from a distance. He looked well enough."

"And Princess Félicité?"

"Again, only from a distance. Her reputation has declined even further, I am sorry to say. So has your husband's."

"Well," she said. "So has mine, I have no doubt." She walked away from them, to rejoin Elena by the water.

"Can she be homesick?" Andrew asked.

"I suppose she can. Not for Henry, but for her home itself. She'll get over it."

Andrew was staring at Elena, and Muldi and the baby girl. "I had no idea you were to be so congratulated."

"Aye. Well, *these* children will not be massacred behind my back, I promise you that, Andrew. But you were going to tell me about Charles. Head of the company! My God! Yet I suppose it had to happen." He smiled. "Do not misunderstand me. I begrudge him nothing. He is far more suited to such a post than I ever was. But that he should so willingly deal with you—that I find strange."

"Yes," Andrew said. "It is, perhaps, more than strange."

"Go on."

"Well . . ." Andrew pulled his nose. "He dealt very fairly with me. Under his aegis I saw the king, who has now returned to Portugal, incidentally, leaving his son as regent. Charles is as thick as thieves with this prince, so he has a good deal of influence. And it was entirely due to his influence that things went so smoothly."

"Then I do not understand your reservations."

"Your cousin also has a wife. An American woman named Joanna. A very charming lady."

"Good for him." Richard frowned. "You have not formed an attachment for this woman, have you? That would really complicate matters."

Andrew flushed. "Of course not, although it would be easy enough to do so. How she married your cousin is difficult to understand. She is not at all like him. She is every inch a lady, whereas he, well . . ."

"Is an unmitigated scoundrel," Richard agreed. "There is no need to hide your opinion of Charles from me. But if he is the man with whom we must deal, then deal with him we shall."

"It is not so simple as that. Mrs. Grant has suggested to me that there may be *double*-dealing involved, particularly in the matter of our sentences, which have been suspended, rather than waived. She hinted that Charles Grant's desire to trade may be only a lure to lull us into a false sense of security, to bring you back to Rio, where you can be arrested."

"*She* suggested this?"

"She did. There was no time for her to explain, but she is obviously deeply concerned."

"Hm. Well, forewarned is forearmed, so they say. Whatever



he plans, he is there, and we are here. As long as we maintain that relationship, his plans cannot touch us. We shall use his lures to our own advantage. Now come, Andrew. You have done magnificently. You deserve an ample reward. And a spell of settled living. Why, for the last few years you have been nearly always at sea, or on the river. Don't you think you should choose yourself a woman, and start another family? I will tell you straight, if your English morals do not permit you to share, then I will have you made deputy *cacique*, with all the rights and prerogatives of the great chieftain himself." He smiled. "At least as regards women."

Andrew sighed, and looked down the slope to where Anne had resumed her ablutions. "Perhaps. I . . . it is a matter to be considered. It . . ." He turned, as there arose a great hubbub from the Indians by the landing stage.

Rorke ran up the slope toward them. "They've caught the bugger, Richard!" he shouted. "A black man, by God."

Richard walked toward the man being half-dragged, half-pushed by the Indians. His body was emaciated, his face haggard. But that he had been, and would be again, a fine figure of a man could not be doubted.

"So this is our brigand," he said. "What tongue does he speak?"

"I speak Portuguese," the black man said, raising his head. "And you must be Colonel Richard Grant."

Richard gazed at him in surprise, and then turned his head in alarm as there came a cry from the stream. Anne had fainted.

With a shrug of his powerful shoulders, Oranatoon threw aside the hands holding him, and went bounding down the slope toward the stream, scattering people left and right as he ran.

"Stop that fellow!" Rorke bellowed. "He means mischief."

"Wait," Richard said, and waved back the two hussars who were running forward. The Indians took their lead from the white men, and the entire village watched while the black man reached the water's edge, where Anne had been laid by two of the women. He knelt beside her, then tenderly raised her in his arms.

Anne's eyes opened, and she stared at him. "Oranatoon?" she whispered. "My God, Oranatoon?" Her head twisted, for she was aware that Richard had approached, with Andrew at his shoulder. The Indians clustered around, muttering to each

other. They had never seen a black man before.

Oranatoon released Anne, and they both got to their feet to face Richard.

"It must be some three years since you fled into the forest, as I understand it," Richard said.

"That is correct, Colonel," Oranatoon said. He gave a brief smile. "It is a long walk."

"It is indeed," Richard agreed. "And you have been looking for me, these three years?"

"I sought the *cacique*, for I was told he would help me. But I did not come alone. I met other fugitives, like myself. We number thirty men and seven women."

"Where?" Andrew demanded.

"There was only one set of tracks," Rorke said.

Oranatoon nodded. "I left them in camp, south of the river. There they have water and abundant food; it is by a small lake that abounds with wild duck. I considered it best that I should approach you alone, Colonel."

"Why?"

"By then I had heard your story from some hunters we encountered."

Richard glanced at Anne. "And you came to me, seeking Anne?"

"I had heard she was with you," Oranatoon said.

Richard gazed at them, Anne's white skin wedged against Oranatoon's black, for his arm was about her shoulders. Nor had she stepped away. Richard was suddenly reminded that this man had been Anne's lover before he was, and that for him she had borne a child. Yet he could not accept that she might still love a black fugitive.

"Then you are a brave and faithful lover," he said. "Come, you must eat with us."

Oranatoon sat on his right, Anne on his left. "You are everything I have heard said of you, Colonel," the black man said. "I am proud to make your acquaintancē."

"And you seem to be everything I have heard said of you, Oranatoon," Richard responded. "What hopes have you, for your little band? Would you join us here in El Dorado?"

Oranatoon hesitated, then shook his head. "Our customs are not your customs, Colonel Grant. And we are even more fugitives than yourselves. We hope to make an El Dorado of our own."

"By your lake?"

Again he shook his head briefly. "We understand that we must proceed farther into the forest. This we will do."

"But you seek help? Weapons?"

"We seek nothing," Oranatoon said. "The Matto Grosso is not so different from the Congo."

"Then were you so anxious merely to look upon my face, Oranatoon?"

"Not *your* face, Colonel."

A great silence had fallen, broken only by the hissing of the fire. The white men waited, as did the mestizo children and those of the Indians who could understand Portuguese. The Indians who could not understand what was being said were yet aware that a situation had been reached that might have to be resolved by arms.

"Anne is my wife, Oranatoon," Richard said. "Nor is she even of your people, your race. Nor is she still a girl. Her life has entered a settled pattern. By coming here to seek her, you can only make her unhappy, by forcing her to recall the past."

"Is it possible for the princess to tell me these things herself?" Oranatoon asked.

Richard shifted his gaze to Anne, and was surprised by her flush, and the way she bit her lip.

"I love the princess," Oranatoon said, still watching Richard, "and I do not love lightly. It is not a habit of my people. All these years I have dreamed of her, and for the last year, since I knew she was here, I have sought her. You have found your El Dorado, Colonel Grant. You are the *cacique*, the great chief. You live here surrounded by your wives and children, your warriors and your friends. Your people. I have yet to find mine. You cannot blame me for seeking my El Dorado in the company of the only woman I have ever loved."

Richard was aware of a sense of shock, that a black man could speak to him so freely and so lucidly, and so reasonably. For the first time, he began to understand what Anne might have found in him to love.

"Yet she is my wife," Richard said quietly, and now he looked at Anne herself.

"Let her come with me, Colonel Grant," Oranatoon said. "And I give you my word, you have but to call, and I will come to your aid with whatever power I command, now and always."

Richard walked away from them, and after a moment Anne followed.

"You wish to go with this black man?" he asked.

"That is unjust of you," she said. "I . . ." Her flush deepened, and a tear escaped her eye. "You once confessed to me that you loved me equally with Elena."

"And that is now driving you from my side?"

"I am confessing to you that I love you equally with Oranatoon. Is that so difficult for you to grasp? Is it so unthinkable, in a woman?"

Richard stared at her. All his instincts were crying out for him to have Oranatoon bound and set adrift in a canoe, to take Anne to his hammock and love her into submission . . . to act, in fact, like the savage he was supposed to have become.

"You did not find it difficult to make a choice between us," Anne said. "But I *must* make a choice, must I not?"

"And would you choose him? Is his weapon longer than mine? Is his kiss more tender? Does he touch you differently from me?"

"Do you *wish* me to answer that?" she asked.

"I wish you to say something to convince me that you are not acting out of feminine pique. Put it down to masculine pride."

She sighed. "Do you suppose I want to *have* to make a choice? I love you, Richard. I know that now. I must always have loved you, but when you wanted me I was afraid to reach out and take you in turn. All my life I have been afraid. I don't think it has been physical fear. I've just been afraid of . . . well, of betraying my birth, my class, my duty. You took that fear and twisted it in those splendid arms of yours and threw it away. So I will never be afraid again. Of anything."

He frowned at her. "Well, then . . ."

"As you have taught me not to fear, Richard, you must accept me as what I am. I am a woman who needs to be loved for herself alone. And I am a woman who needs to possess her man. How could I ever possess Richard Grant, *cacique* of the Upper Amazon? How could any woman ever do that? Elena understands that, and is content with it. I could never be. If I was afraid of what people might say, of admitting that I was the mistress of a black man, of going against race and upbringing and religion, then I would stay here, no matter what the cost. But as I am no longer afraid of those things . . ."

"Do you realize what you are doing?" he demanded. "Have you seriously considered what lies ahead? The dangers and the

discomforts of trying to exist in the forest? The sort of life you would have, with people totally alien to yourself? *They* won't love you, you know."

"But Oranatoon *will*," she said fiercely. "He will love me and only me." She attempted a smile. "Put that down to female pride."

"And my love for you means nothing?"

Her shoulders sagged. "I have tried to explain."

"What would you have me do?"

She raised her head to gaze at him, her lips slightly parted.

His turn to sigh. "Aye," he said. "You want me to give up everything, for you."

"And that you cannot, will not, do," she said.

He hesitated, and her heart did a curious twist, for if he were to say yes . . . She did not really want him to say yes. There it was. She had, after all, made her choice.

"Andrew will see to the provisioning of a canoe," he said, and turned away.

Anne held his arm. "Now you are angry."

"Why, yes," he said. "So I am. Would *your* pride not be hurt if I weren't?"

"And you will not understand."

"Oh, I understand, Anne," he said. "But that does not make it any easier to accept."

"But will you accept that I do love you, too?"

His mouth twisted, and then relaxed. "Aye," he said. "And I thank you for the past years. Go with Oranatoon, and prosper." He reached out to stroke her cheek. "And if you do not, remember El Dorado. It will always be here."

"My dear, you look magnificent." Charles Grant kissed his wife's hand. "You will dazzle our guests. And I promise you, I have a surprise for you."

Joanna adjusted an emerald earring as she watched herself in the mirror above the mock fireplace. She wore a pink gown with matching gloves and shoes. Although her shoulders were bare and her décolletage deep, yet the silk material, as well as the gloves, were far too warm for comfort on a Brazilian evening. Besides, having seen the guest list, she was sweating with uneasy anticipation. But Charles had insisted she wear her very best for this dinner party.

"I am sure you have surprised me enough, Charles," she

said. "First you tell me that you do not wish me to visit this princess de Coimbra, so I have not done so these three years; and now you have invited her to supper."

"Circumstances change, my love," Charles said, kissing her neck. "No doubt you are unaware that this is so, as you only leave the house to visit your dressmaker, in search of new French fashions. Yet even you must have noticed that you are probably the only customer these days."

Joanna adjusted her emerald necklace, which matched her earrings. "If you mean that times are hard, I have observed that. If you mean that the very name of Grant is regarded as anathema by most people, I have observed that also."

"They are happy enough to sell you their wares," Charles snapped. "But you are perfectly right. Times are hard, and with these continual demands for additional funds from Lisbon, they are going to get harder, unless we do something about it."

"We?"

"Myself, and some friends of mine. And chief amongst those friends is Prince Henry. Thus I would now have you become friends with Princess Félicité. She may shock you, but I would ask you not to *be* shocked. It is in a good cause. And as Barbara de Carvalho never leaves her plantation, Filly is the only other woman attending tonight. Thus you will have an opportunity for a long gossip. Filly is a great one for gossip."

He turned away, and she rested her hand on his arm. "Charles, you are not proposing anything rash, are you?"

"Rash? I have no idea what you mean."

"Well," she said, "the whole continent... Chile has declared independence, Venezuela fights for it, La Plata has claimed it..." She tried to smile. "I had not imagined I was married to a revolutionary."

"And you an American, my love? Your ancestors and mine began the whole independence business. But I am *not* a Republican. Brazil will always have a king, I give you my word."

"Yes, but—" She bit her lip in annoyance as the butler presented himself in the doorway.

"Mr. Andrew Cullen," he said.

"Mr. Cullen?" she cried, her irritation disappearing as she hurried into the drawing room, hands outstretched. "How good to see you again, after all this time. But..." She glanced at her husband.

"He appeared last week," Charles explained casually, join-

ing them. "Oh, indeed, my dear, I was as surprised as you. I supposed that my cousin, the great chief —" He paused to smile. — "was not satisfied with the goods I had sent him."

"Satisfied, sir?" Cullen asked. "Why, since I last saw you, his crop has come to fruition. I have brought with me several hundred pounds of best coffee beans, which I have today delivered to your roasting house. There will be regular crops from now on, which is why Colonel Grant feels the need for a permanent agent here in Rio."

"And you volunteered to return," Joanna said, searching his face with her gaze.

"I know the place, and the people, Mrs. Grant, if I may say so."

"Indeed you do, Mr. Cullen," Charles said. "Indeed you do. And we're glad to see you again. Is that not so, Joanna? I told her, you know, Mr. Cullen, that I had a surprise for her, and she did not understand me. Are you not pleased to see Mr. Cullen again, my love?"

"I—" Her cheeks flamed. "It is indeed a pleasure, Mr. Cullen. I look forward to having a talk with you later on. But I think our other guests have arrived." She left for the entry hall.

"My dear Joanna," Félicité gushed, kissing her upon each cheek. The princess had put on a great deal of weight; her once-trim figure was lost beneath rolls of fat that bulged out of her gown. "I feel like the queen, at last being invited here."

"Oh, I—" Joanna glanced at her husband.

"Joanna quite refused to entertain until she was satisfied that her Portuguese was as fluent as a native's," Charles explained.

"But I speak English," Félicité said, kissing Joanna again. "So that was no excuse for you not to visit *me*. Yet I shall forgive you, because you are so pretty, my dear, and because I know we are going to be the very best of friends." She released Joanna, took a step toward the drawing room, and checked. "Good God!"

"Highness." Andrew bowed.

"That man," Félicité announced, pointing, "is an utter scoundrel."

"Eh? Eh?" Prince Henry blinked at Andrew.

"He assisted Richard Grant in kidnapping your wife," Félicité said. "The wretch."

"By God," Henry said. "Charles, I am astonished. Indeed I am!" He too had put on weight, and puffed as he spoke.

"You must be aware, Highness," Charles said, "that Mr. Cullen is no longer an outlaw. Now come, sir, shake hands with the prince, and let bygones be bygones. He is important to our project," he whispered loudly in Henry's ear.

"His Excellency, Lord Cochrane," the butler announced.

Joanna curtsied to the famous Englishman, who with his shock of curly black hair and his big nose reminded her of portraits she had seen of the Duke of Wellington, although Cochrane was a good deal more handsome.

"I am charmed, ma'am," he said. "All of Rio has charmed me, but none so much as this moment."

"Why, My Lord," she stammered, "it is we who are honored. Have you business here?"

Cochrane glanced at Charles. "I am on holiday, ma'am."

"Between liberating countries, eh?" Charles said with a shout of laughter.

"As you say, sir," Cochrane agreed, his lip curling.

Joanna turned away in embarrassment, to greet Thomas da Cunha, of the famous Pernambuco family.

"Thomas is also on a visit to Rio," Charles explained.

"I had not expected Coimbra to be here," da Cunha growled. He was a short, thickset man with a heavy moustache.

"But he is one of *us*, Thomas," Charles said. "Your republican ideas might not attract him, but they do not attract me, either."

"Well, then, I do not see why *I* am here," da Cunha said. "Perhaps I should leave."

"Nonsense, Thomas." Charles clapped him on the shoulder. "Have we not all the same goal, whatever the eventual form of government? You'll stay, and drink to our project."

Joanna found herself almost unable to breathe, as she faced the door, and the final guest, Ramon de Carvalho, commander of the Rio garrison.

"It is a pleasure to welcome you to my house, Senor de Carvalho," she said.

"It is a pleasure to be here, Senora," Ramon said, and frowned as he looked over the guests. "Although I would say, this has less the appearance of a supper party than a conspiracy." He kissed her hand again. "But I am talking nonsense, surely, where so gracious a hostess is concerned."



\* \* \*

"Oh, ignore them," Félicité recommended, as Joanna wandered toward the hall door for the fifth time. "They are conspiring. Men are always conspiring. Come back here and sit down, my dear Joanna, and let me tell you about my experiments. Of course, there are already people of mixed Indian and Negro blood. Hundreds of them. Probably thousands. But these have always been the results of rape or a drunken evening. Quite unchosen for suitability. I have made a serious study of the matter. I began some years ago. I advertised for Indian housemaids. Everyone thought I was mad, and said so. Indian housemaids, they asked? Why, they are quite incapable of doing any consistent work, they break things, they steal, and they are not really amenable to discipline. As for drink, the mere smell of a wine bottle and they are inebriated. But they, or I suppose their parents, were eager for the money. I made the poor fools bind their daughters over to me, so that they would have no redress. And I chose only the pretty ones, of course. Some Indian girls are quite remarkably pretty. Do sit down, my dear."

"I prefer to stand," Joanna said, moving to the window from where she could obtain some air. The other woman's conversation left her feeling quite faint, and distinctly nauseated.

"Well," Félicité went on, "then I coupled them with my strongest and handsomest young blacks. Under careful supervision, of course. I personally attended to the matter."

"You?"

"My dear, it is fascinating."

"But . . . my God!"

"Have you ever mated dogs or horses?"

"Well . . . I have seen it done."

"Then show me the difference," the princess said triumphantly. "And it has been a great success, I can tell you. I now have several little boys and girls with black skins and curly hair, but who are otherwise as Indian as you could wish. I think they are going to be most handsome when they grow up. I look forward to showing them to you."

"Yes," Joanna agreed, fanning herself vigorously, and sighing with relief as she heard the men approaching. "Well, senors," she said, "have you solved the problems of the universe?"

"Of the country, perhaps," Prince Henry said, smiling at her.

The footmen came in with fresh cigars, and brandy to drink with the coffee, and Joanna managed to find herself beside Andrew Cullen. "Have you no feeling for your own health?" she asked softly in English. "Or do you treat a woman's warning with contempt?"

"On the contrary, Mrs. Grant," he said, "my friends and I take your warning very seriously. But we must know what goes on in Rio." He smiled at her. "In the enemy camp."

"And *you* volunteered once more to place your head in the lion's mouth," she said, raising her glass to a smiling Charles across the room. "May I ask why?"

"May I ask why you care, Mrs. Grant?"

She forced herself to remain gazing calmly into the room. "I endeavor to save my husband from committing any crimes," she said. "And my efforts must be clandestine, for he will not listen to me."

"And now he contemplates the greatest crime of all," Andrew said.

"In which you are willing<sup>A</sup> to become involved."

"In which he wishes my involvement, certainly. Or at least that of Colonel Grant. I have promised to put his proposals before the colonel."

"Then you are mad," she said. "If any heads fall, yours and your Colonel Grant's will most certainly be among them."

"I have that in mind. And I value your interest, Mrs. Grant. Do you suppose you will be able to maintain it?"

Now she did glance at him.

"But then," he said, "your head would also be entering the lion's mouth."

Her chin tilted. "I am Joanna Harrington, as well as Joanna Grant, Mr. Cullen. My father disposes of more money than the entire revenue of Brazil. And my husband is well aware of that."

"Yet your father is several thousand miles away."

"That is still too close, for Charles's comfort. Yes, Mr. Cullen, I will maintain my interest, and endeavor to save us all from catastrophe."

His gaze held hers, for now the question had to be asked with his eyes.

"So there it is." Prince Pedro of Alcántara threw the document on the table in front of him, and glanced from left to

right at the concerned faces watching him. "My father needs money. And there is no one else to whom he can turn."

"Cannot the Portuguese pay taxes?" someone asked.

"The country remains devastated by the war," the Prince said.

"The war with Bonaparte ended in 1814, Your Highness. It is now 1822."

"You must understand, senors, that Portugal is not a rich country. It lacks the resources of Brazil. Recovery will undoubtedly take a long time."

"We had supposed, Your Highness," said someone else, "that with the departure of His Majesty and the court, and our victory over Buenos Aires, our taxes would *decrease*. We had not supposed they would continue to rise."

"I know," Pedro complained. "I had hoped so too. But what can I do? His Majesty *is* my father. He is also our king. When he summons us to pay our taxes, whatever the burden, then our taxes must be paid." He turned to the man seated on his right. "What else can we do?"

Charles Grant flicked ash from his cigar. "We can refuse."

"Refuse? *Refuse* to pay our taxes to our lawful King?"

Charles sat up. "Your Highness, you know as well as I that your father, for all his many talents, possesses a love of ostentation and display that amounts to extravagance. That Brazil is so poverty-stricken at this moment is due to His Majesty's determination to rebuild Rio at the same time that he undertook a war with the Argentines. By our unremitting efforts, he managed to accomplish both those objectives. But we are still paying for them.

"And what have we achieved? The Banda Oriental—ah, pardon me, the Cisplatine Province—is a haven for criminals and scoundrels of every description, and is constantly being invaded by Argentine marauders, thus requiring more expense. Rio de Janeiro is most certainly a beautiful city to look upon, but does a handsome building feed a single mouth, bring a single penny into any of our pockets? We will recover from such extravagances. We are already well on our way to doing so. But we cannot do so if we are now called upon to pay for fresh extravagances, six thousand miles away. And, Your Highness, my sea captains inform me that there is just such a rebuilding of Lisbon being carried on, as well as a reorganization of Portugal's army. To what purpose? I ask myself. Who

is His Majesty going to fight now? I will tell you what I hear—that his Majesty intends to overturn the constitution he agreed with the Portuguese Córtes, and resume personal rule. A revolution which may well involve bloodshed, and is to be undertaken with our money.”

Pedro stared at him in amazement. “He is the king,” he said.

“And you are his regent, here in Brazil. It is your duty to care for this vast country you are called upon to govern.”

“Yet is he the *king*,” Pedro shouted. “And my father. How may a man defy both the king and his father?”

Charles looked around the table.

“Six thousand miles is a great deal of water,” remarked Prince Henry.

“You . . . you would have me . . .” The prince bit his lip, afraid to put into words the thought that had just crossed his mind. He slumped back in his chair. “That is quite impossible. I shall pretend you did not speak those words to me, Cousin.”

“Impossible? Why is it impossible?” Charles asked.

“Because . . . because it would be rebellion against our rightful king. And aside from that, it is physically impossible. Rebel? What are we to rebel with? Brazil is garrisoned by Portuguese soldiers. Ramon—” He pointed at Ramon de Carvalho, seated at the far end of the table. “How do you stand in this?”

“I agree with Prince Henry and Senor Grant,” he said. “We cannot stand idly by and watch Brazil bled white. Moreover, we cannot risk an insurrection. There are already rumblings of discontent throughout the country. In Pernambuco there is open talk of a republic. But—”

“Yes?”

Ramon sighed. “As you say, Highness, most of my men are Portuguese and look forward to returning to Lisbon when their term of duty is completed. I cannot promise many of them would follow a rebellious course.”

“There,” Pedro said. “What did I tell you? This is madness, even for us to discuss it. We could be arrested. We could all be hanged.”

“There are approximately two million people living in Brazil,” Prince Henry said. “And there are some five thousand soldiers, of which half are garrisoning the Banda Oriental. Is that not true, father-in-law?”

Ramon flushed, as he always did when Henry reminded him

of Anne's crimes. "That is so. But still . . . there is the navy, as well—"

"One line of battleships, and a few sloops?"

"Sufficient to move men from place to place," Ramon pointed out. "And to keep open a line of communication with Lisbon. Now, if we had a navy of our own . . ."

Henry looked at Charles.

"We do have a navy," Charles said. "If it came to fighting, which I doubt, the Grant Company vessels would be placed at the disposal of the Brazilian government."

"Trading ships," Prince Pedro said.

"Well armed."

"And who among your crews has any knowledge of naval warfare, Charles?" Pedro demanded. "Now, if your grandfather were still alive, eh? But without him—"

"There is a man in Rio at this moment," Charles said. "Lord Cochrane. You may have heard of him."

"He was dismissed from the Royal Navy," Pedro declared, "and has been fighting with the Chileans."

Charles leaned forward. "And has not Chile secured its independence from the Spanish Crown? Of all South America, it alone has so far succeeded, however hard the other Spanish colonies may be trying. And that is because of Cochrane. He is a brilliant fighter at sea. Do you know that when he first commanded a frigate in the Royal Navy, he captured *fifty* enemy ships in a single year?"

"And this man will fight for us?" someone asked.

"Why should he?"

"Because fighting is his trade," Charles said.

"Fighting?" Prince Pedro shouted. "Who said anything about fighting? Independence? My God, you sit here and preach treason! You go too far, too fast, Charles Grant. What if I were to call upon Ramon to arrest you all?"

"Himself included, Your Highness?" Charles asked softly.

Pedro got up and walked to the window, to stare out at the yard. "Too far, too fast," he reiterated. "I understand your motives. I understand they are honorable. I understand my duty. But my duty is not only to Brazil. It is also to my father. I shall send him a letter, informing him that our circumstances do not permit us to pay any increased taxes, and begging him to be reasonable. He is a reasonable man. But let me hear no more talk of rebellion and independence."

"The Empire of Brazil," Prince Henry said quietly. "Pedro the First would be its emperor."

Pedro glanced at him, and flushed.

"I think your course is the correct one, Highness," Charles said. "Yet I shall request Lord Cochrane to remain in Rio for a season—as my guest, of course."

William Grant stared at his nephew in utter consternation. "What did you say?" he demanded.

Charles sat opposite him, at the end of the long dining table in the Big House. Joanna was on his right, her fingers anxiously twisted together, but the rest of the family were gathered in a defensive huddle at the far end of the room. Yet Charles smiled at them with complete confidence.

"I felt it only correct to inform you, Uncle William, Father, before the actual step is taken."

"You . . ." Anthony grasped for words. "You can sit there quite calmly, and tell me that you are planning rebellion against your king?"

"You oversimplify, Father," Charles said. "I am planning a *change* of kings, that is all. With, I may say, the complete agreement of Prince Pedro, and with the good of Brazil in mind. Heaven knows, we have tried. We have written to Lisbon, we have even sent ambassadors, pointing out that we can no longer be treated as a colony, bled white for the good of Portugal. Equality is all we asked for. And Brazil is a hundred times the size of Portugal. Yet what has been the result? King John has sent envoys, not to the Brazilian government, but to Prince Pedro alone, demanding complete obedience to his decrees, and when His Highness tried to temporize, they actually attempted to *kidnap* him and place him on board a warship for removal to Portugal. Can you believe it?"

"They obviously learned something of what was in the wind," Inez Cutter remarked.

"And is kidnapping an answer to that?" Charles demanded.

"So now these envoys are under arrest," William said. "Return them to Lisbon. King John will then realize that he *must* negotiate with us as equals. But rebellion—why, Father must be turning over in his grave."

"Grandfather Jack *is* in his grave, Uncle William. Whether he turns over or not is irrelevant. Times have changed."

"But . . . to commit the entire Grant Company fleet to such a mad scheme makes no sense," Hal Cutter protested. "Suppose

there is a civil war, as is most likely, and it drags on for years? All the other wars of independence, from the United States down, lasted several years. In Venezuela they are still fighting, ten years after the cry of independence was first raised. What will happen to our profits?"

Charles sighed with contempt. "Do you suppose, Uncle Hal, that a few years' profits are going to matter, compared with the prizes that are to be won following independence? An independence won with Grant Company aid?"

"What does Richard say to this?" Inez asked quietly.

"I have informed Richard of the situation, through his agent here in Rio, exactly as I have informed all the provincial governors. I have not yet had a reply. But he fought for the independence of Venezuela, and he has little cause to love King John."

"He has little cause to love you either," Inez said.

"Which is why it is necessary for us to present a united front. I want a unanimous agreement on the course of action I have mapped out." He looked from face to face.

"Without discussion, as usual," Hal observed.

"We have just had a discussion, Uncle Hal," Charles pointed out. "Now it is time to make a decision. As for Richard, if he opposes us it will be because of his personal dislike for me. I do not think he will. He has been happy enough to trade with us these past few years. But either way, it does not matter. He is several thousand miles away, up the Amazon. He cannot influence the issue, now. And the die is cast. It *will* happen." Now he gazed at Aunt Célestine, who had not yet offered an opinion.

"As you say, Charles," she said quietly, "the die is cast." Her mouth twisted in a smile. "The die was cast the day we invited you to return to Rio." She pushed back her chair and stood up. "But since it is cast, and since this is certainly known to King John, then it seems to me we have two very simple choices, either to plunge in the disaster that will follow a disagreement among ourselves, or to rise to the heights that are possible, if we throw all our weight behind Prince Pedro."

"That is no choice at all," William said.

Célestine smiled at him pityingly. "Exactly," she said.

The rowers shipped their oars, passed the towropes to the waiting Indians, and watched while the sloop behind them was pulled alongside the dock. They looked around with anxious

yet delighted eyes. The sailors were men from the coast, Portuguese and mulatto, and hitherto the Upper Amazon had been only a place of legend to them, as frightening as it was exciting. Now they stared at the cultivated fields that stretched away in every direction from the town, an immense scar on the hitherto virginal green of the forest; they gazed at the docks and warehouses, at the simple wooden church that rose at the very center of the houses, and at the houses themselves, many of them no longer mere roofs of troolie-palm thatching, but houses with walls and even furniture.

Thomas da Cunha stepped ashore from the sloop, and faced the tall, black-haired man who ruled this domain. Richard Grant's face was lined from squinting at the sun, but there was no gray in his hair, and his body was powerfully vigorous. Yet there was an expression of indefinable sadness in those strongly etched features. It was easy to suppose that despite the paradise he was reputed to have created for himself here, he missed the challenges as well as the rewards of that civilization he had left behind.

And that, da Cunha reflected, was all to the good. He extended his hand. "Richard Grant. I think we met once, as boys."

"I remember. Welcome to El Dorado. I would like you to meet my wife, Elena."

Da Cunha hesitated, then bowed over the woman's hand. She must be in her early twenties, he thought, and was extraordinarily pretty, with the grace and carriage of a white woman and the marvelous complexion of an Indian. She unconcernedly carried a babe at her breast, busy with the nipple, and held another, two or three years old, by the hand.

"My wife, Muldi," Richard said.

She was about Elena's age, da Cunha decided, pure Indian, and also busy nursing a babe.

"My wife, Tulane."

An altogether older woman, also pure Indian, da Cunha estimated, and probably past childbearing. But she also had two children in tow.

"The commander of my militia, Captain Rorke. His second-in-command, Lieutenant Hall. The head of our mission, Father Paolo."

The priest in his black cassock seemed almost incongruous in the midst of so much flesh. It was a sign of Richard Grant's power that the old customs still held despite the establishment



of a mission. There was no other Indian settlement that da Cunha had ever heard of where this was so.

They sat around the fire to eat and drink *piwarrie*. "You have come a long way, Thomas, to visit me."

"It is important time for us, Richard. For all Brazil."

"From what I have heard from my agent in Rio, Andrew Cullen, the important time has passed. Don Pedro's cry of Ypiranga in 1822 was the important time."

"Bah," da Cunha remarked. "In this day it is quite simple to declare independence, especially when it was well known King John lacked the resources to send an army against us. The Cry of Ypiranga was a farce, managed like any stage play, to give the common people something to shout about. Don Pedro could have accomplished as much by writing a letter, rather than indulging in dramatic gestures. The Empire of Brazil! What nonsense. I am not aware that our taxes have in any way diminished. We have merely exchanged one extravagant monarch for another. This one calls himself emperor. Emperors are even more expensive to maintain than kings."

Richard drank *piwarrie*, and waited.

"There is also the matter of your inheritance," da Cunha went on. "Or disinheritance. It is all very well to say that the Grant Company made Don Pedro I, and that your cousin is now the second most important man in the empire. Should that position not by rights be yours? You lost it because of the king's displeasure. But now the king no longer reigns over us. Then there is the matter of Henry de Coimbra. He also stands at the emperor's right hand. He and your cousin, in fact, are almost brothers in everything they undertake. And he hates the very sound of your name. Can you be sure he will not influence your cousin against you?"

Richard smiled. "That would not be very difficult to do."

"Well, then . . ."

"Your letter was necessarily guarded," Richard said. "I think perhaps you should tell me plainly what you intend."

Thomas da Cunha drew a long breath. "We in Pernambuco, in the entire north, for that matter, think that the day of monarchy is dead, certainly here in America. The very word is an obscenity. Has not President Monroe told Europe to keep its hands off? And he will enforce it, with the power of the United States. For us to have an emperor is absurd."

"Mexico has an emperor," Richard pointed out.

"Mexico has a military dictator," da Cunha retorted. "And that is what we will have here, if we are not careful. Well, we in the north will have none of it. If we don't get enough support in the south, we will declare our own independence. This country is big enough to be divided into two. But you, Richard, you are part of the north. An important part."

"You will declare independence for North Brazil?" Richard said. "And what will you do if the emperor decides to regard that as rebellion? What forces do you have to put into the field against him?"

"What forces has *he*, now that the Portuguese garrisons have been repatriated?"

"He has the Grant Company fleet, as I understand, commanded by the redoubtable Lord Cochrane. They disposed of the Portuguese fleet easily enough."

"Bah. What can they do against us? Bombard Pernambuco? They are welcome to do so. You may be sure that even Cochrane will not bring a battle fleet up the Amazon."

"If you are so sure of success, why come to me?"

"Because you are an important part of North Brazil, Richard. How can we set up a nation, here, without the support of the *cacique* of the Amazon tribes? And besides, your army here is probably the best in Brazil, if it comes to actual fighting."

"It will come to fighting," Richard said. "Be sure of that. I know my cousin. He will not give away one square foot of anything he possesses. And as you say, he is the prop of the throne."

"And you will not oppose him? The man who has stolen your inheritance?"

"I left my inheritance lying on the ground," Richard said. "Charles picked it up. I cannot hate him for that. I have reason to believe that he has never been my friend, and perhaps never will be. But he cannot harm me here. He provides me with goods and services. We are of mutual use to each other."

"Now you are sounding like a true Grant," da Cunha said bitterly. "Money is more important to you than blood."

"You are my guest, Thomas," Richard said evenly, "and therefore I will not take offense. I am advancing reasons why Charles should always deal fairly with me, other things being equal. If you wish to hear about blood, well, I have seen enough of it shed in wars of independence. I was invited by my friend, Simón Bolívar, to return and assist him in *his* struggle for

independence. I felt forced to refuse. Happily he has now won his war without me. Yet I do not regret my decision. I am here to give my people peace and prosperity. El Dorado is a part of Brazil. It will remain so. On that subject you have my unequivocal promise. I will not be a party to any civil conflict. There are good kings and there are bad kings. It is too early yet to decide about Don Pedro. But I can tell you that there are also good presidents and bad presidents, and that all military dictators are bad."

"Then you are against us," da Cunha said. "You will stab us in the back."

"I will not fight you, Thomas," Richard said. "But neither will I fight the emperor. El Dorado will remain part of Brazil, and our ultimate allegiance will be paid to whoever governs in Rio. If it is you, then be sure of my support. Until that day, then I will drink a toast to Don Pedro."

Da Cunha emptied his cup on the ground, rather than drink. "You think you can spend the rest of your life, Richard Grant, sitting on the fence, guarded by your forests and your rivers, your alligators and your snakes. One day you will learn that you are wrong."

"The King is dead," the bishop said. "Long live the King."

The emperor bowed his head, waited in reverent silence for as long as he thought proper, then looked up at the men gathered around his table, faces equally concerned. But now he could smile.

"Well, senors," he said, "fate plays many a trick, eh? Who would have supposed my father would have so forgiven me as to leave me the Portuguese throne? The empire is reunited. By God, there is a happy thought." He beamed at them. "I promise you, I shall change the name. Where it was Portugal, Brazil, and the Algarves, it shall now be Brazil, Portugal, and the Algarves." He looked from face to face, controlled a frown as he realized that no one was smiling back. "Well," he said. "Sit down, senors. Let us get down to business." He seated himself. "I will confess to you all, I have been worried, from time to time, these past few years. To declare myself an emperor, with only daughters to follow me . . . but now the future is bright, with little Don Pedro recovered from his coughing. And then, that business in the north . . . you are sure there is nothing more to be feared there, Ramon?"

"Since da Cunha's execution, Your Highness, the revolution has collapsed."

"And the Indians?"

"They remained passive, as their *cacique* promised." Carvalho's mouth twisted, as it always did whenever Richard's name was mentioned.

"For which we must be thankful," Pedro agreed. "Well, we must now look to the future. I would have you keep your army in full strength, Ramon. It is time we settled matters once and for all with Argentina. That is where we will direct our next efforts. I shall, of course, be returning to Portugal to inspect conditions there. Besides . . ." He smiled. "I shall have to be crowned. That will be an experience, eh? To be crowned twice within five years? I don't think even Napoleon managed that."

Once again he waited for answering smiles, once again in vain.

"Of course," he said, "it will only be a visit. Presumably I will *have* to divide my time between here and Europe, but you may be certain that I shall spend more time in Rio than in Lisbon. But my going there will be to our good. Perhaps it may be possible for us to extract money from them, for a change."

Again he was answered with blank faces. "Senors," he said, somewhat plaintively. "Your emperor would appreciate a little enthusiasm. Can you not perceive that the entire world has fallen into our hands? It is even possible to see the work of God, the confirmation that everything we have done has been with His approval." He stared from face to face. "Well?" he demanded. "This is supposed to be a council. Charles?"

Charles Grant sat up, looked to left and right, and cleared his throat. "Four years ago, Your Highness, we declared the independence of Brazil. We are sworn to maintain it. It is impossible to consider reunification with Portugal."

"Impossible? But my dear Charles, I have just explained that I will use Portugal for our benefit."

"We cannot perceive any possible benefit, Your Highness," Charles said. "And while you may have your heart firmly set here in Rio, you cannot answer for your successors. In 1822 we declared our independence of Portugal and of European affairs. We cannot consider any step backwards."

"Backwards?" Pedro demanded. "That is absurd! Do you not see! Very well, allow me to demonstrate how wrong you

are. For the time being, we will establish a dual monarchy, eh? Rather as William the Third did for England and Holland, a hundred years ago. That worked very well."

"It worked well for Holland," Prince Henry remarked. "It involved Britain in a series of European wars."

"England and Holland were also a short sea passage apart, Your Majesty," Charles said. "It would be quite impossible, where six thousand miles of ocean separate the two kingdoms, even if it were desirable. Which it is not."

Now the emperor did frown. "Are you suggesting I should not accept the Portuguese crown?"

"Precisely."

"*You* are presuming to tell me what I must do with my ancestral rights? The Braganzas have sat upon the throne of Portugal for eight hundred years. Well, our ancestors have done so, anyway." He stood up. "I tell you frankly, senors, I find you presumptuous. I am emperor of Brazil, as I am now also king of Portugal and the Algarves. If I summon you here, it is because I desire to rule with the wholehearted support of my people. But I *am* the emperor. I *will* rule. It is my prerogative, given to me by God." He gazed at the bishop, who flushed and looked down. "I have no intention of yielding those prerogatives to anyone. It is your business to expedite my wishes, not sit in judgment upon them."

The advisors exchanged glances, and Henry de Coimbra nodded to Charles.

"Your Majesty," Charles said, "I beg you to understand how sincerely we grieve that this crisis should have occurred, that we should be forced to remind you of certain facts that we had assumed were self-evident, and therefore better left unsaid." He paused. "God did not make you emperor of Brazil. We did."

He watched Pedro slowly sink back into his chair, his face a mask of frustrated anger.

"Ramon de Carvalho's army fights for us, not for you. Lord Cochrane fought for the independence of Brazil, not for the perpetuation of a monarchy. My ships are at the disposal of the Brazilian people, and therefore, at your disposal, as long as you remain emperor of Brazil. It is our wish that Brazil should remain a monarchy. We have seen too many of the evils, all around us here in South America, that attend an elective presidency. We rejoice with you in the birth of Don

Pedro, which assures us of the continued rule of your house. Rule us wisely and well, and in accordance with the wishes of the people of this great empire, and you will find us always loyal and devoted." Another measured pause. "Leave us, for even a day, and we will look elsewhere."

Pedro stared at him. "You are speaking treason," he said. "I shall have you arrested. I shall hang you beside Thomas da Cunha."

"The only treason of which a man may be guilty, Your Highness, is the betrayal of his country. It has been learned, these past fifty years, that even kings and emperors can be guilty of that crime."

Pedro swung away from him, glared down the table at Ramon de Carvalho, who returned his gaze. Then he looked at Henry de Coimbra, then at the other advisors, who waited, stony-faced.

"You are declaring me your prisoner," he shouted.

"We are trying to keep you as our emperor," Henry said.

Pedro's shoulders slumped. "You want me to hand over the crown of Portugal to my brother Miguel?"

"Surely that is not necessary, Your Highness," Charles said. "You have children."

"By God." Pedro sat up. "Of course! I shall renounce the throne of Portugal in favor of Don Pedro."

"No, Highness."

"What?"

"Don Pedro is the future emperor of Brazil. He is also but one year old. You have four daughters."

"Maria? She is *seven*. That is old enough for you?"

Charles shrugged. "Let us say, Your Majesty, that where a man has four daughters and but one son, and an empire to rule, it is the son who demands the greater care, the greater attention."

"You—" The emperor thought better of what he was going to say.

"His Grace the bishop will announce that Maria da Gloria will be the new queen of Portugal," Charles said. "And I will have my ships made ready to carry her and her entourage back to Portugal."

Pedro stared at him for some seconds, his face twisted with rage. Then he threw back his chair and left the room.

"You don't agree that to make an enemy of an emperor is a dangerous thing?" Prince Henry leaned back on the settee in Madame Charmaine's private parlor and sipped French champagne. Madame Charmaine was French, and catered only to the wealthiest men in Rio. But all other customers were turned away when Charles Grant and his friend decided to call; here, speaking English, they were sure of privacy.

"*That* emperor?" Charles asked. "I have never met anyone more puerile."

"Even puerile men can be dangerous," Henry said.

"No doubt. No doubt we made a mistake in elevating him. I suspect he will have to go."

Henry frowned. "You make it sound so simple. We *have* elevated him. We may remind him that he only rules through our efforts, and with our support. But to the people he is the emperor. Emperors are not to be made and unmade as simply as that."

"Why not?" Charles asked.

"Why not? Well, because . . . my God, Charles, sometimes you terrify me. You terrified me four years ago. So we got away with it, without more than token resistance. We will not be so lucky the next time. We have accustomed our people to being ruled by an emperor. They will fight for him."

Charles smiled at him. "Not if they discover him to be no better than his father."

"And how will they do that? At the moment there is no more popular man in Brazil. Having him renounce the Portuguese throne has made him an idol to the mob."

"Yes, but those whom the mob choose as an idol are the most vulnerable to that very mob. Our great emperor is deeply involved in Portuguese affairs. Trying to maintain that half-witted daughter of his on the throne will involve him even more deeply. This war with Argentina will be a disaster. You wait. Patience is all we need. His popularity will wane."

"And then we will depose him? For heaven's sake, Charles, are you mad? The people only accepted the King John's removal because we had another king ready-made. They worship the monarchy."

"So? Have we not another king, ready-made?"

"A one-year-old boy?"

"What could be better? There will have to be a council of regency. A regency that would last a very long time," Charles

said. "A regency that could well last forever."

"What exactly do you mean?"

Charles got up to refill their glasses. "I wonder you have never thought of remarrying, Henry."

"Me? How can I?"

"To all intents and purposes Anne is dead. No one has heard a word of her since she ran off with Richard. I am sure we could persuade the Church to consider her dead if you wished to remarry."

"Perhaps," Henry agreed cautiously.

"You do not seem very pleased at the prospect. My God, I wish I could find some reason for having Joanna pronounced dead."

Henry frowned at him. "Do you not get along? I always thought—"

"Like most married couples, my dear Henry, we maintain a front. The fact is, we have never really got along. Joanna has never cared for sexual matters. And now she has also taken up supporting the rest of the family against me."

"This business of converting to steam?"

"Oh, the Grant Company *will* have steamships. I promise you I will prevail on that point. Really, Father and Uncle William would do better to retire altogether. As for Cutter . . . they are old men, afraid to spend money, afraid to move with the times. But we will have steam, whether they like it or not."

"Because you succeed in whatever you set out to do."

"It's a good system to maintain," Charles said. "But you are trying to change the subject. Anne is dead. And you are a lonely widower."

Henry grinned. "I am perfectly happy. To tell you the truth, Charles, I have come to the conclusion that I do not like women. I like little girls, such as Charmaine provides. As you say, women have moods. Women only put up with you. Anne always did."

"Then marry a little girl," Charles said. "It is exactly what I had in mind."

Henry stared at him, the color draining from his face. "Are you mad?"

"The Princess Januaria is a pretty little thing," Charles reflected.

"She is four years old!"



"Well, she too will take a long while growing up."

"And she is virtually my niece."

"Not quite as close as that, Henry. Besides, men have married their nieces before."

"Don Pedro would have a fit at the very idea."

"We are looking to a time when Don Pedro will no longer be here."

"And do you suppose he will leave his children behind?"

"When the time comes, Henry, he will do whatever we say. But do you know, the possible ramifications are fascinating. Why, supposing little Prince Pedro were to have an accident. Or an illness, from which he never recovered. This would be after his father's abdication, of course. Then we would have a situation where, with the Princess Maria already being Queen of Portugal, the only possible ruler of Brazil would be the Princess Januaria. Queen Januaria. One could wish that our emperor had made a slightly happier choice of name. But there it is. And of course, the actual ruler of the country would be Januaria's husband. As I say, the ramifications are endless."

Henry took out a handkerchief to wipe his brow, then went to the door and threw it open. "Bring in two girls, Charmaine," he said. "My God, I need them."

Charles smiled.

"Ituzaingo was the last straw," Andrew Cullen explained. "Don Pedro had already lost his popularity, of course. It really was a fatal mistake of his to have accepted the crown of Portugal for his daughter, and left her under the regency of his brother, Miguel. Of course Miguel waited for his opportunity to depose her and send her packing back to Rio. And of course Pedro reacted, and started calling for money and men to reinstate her. It was like some Greek play, where every plot twist can be worked out beforehand. It was all inevitable."

"And no one in Rio was interested in the little queen?" Richard asked.

"Rio has problems of its own. All Brazil has problems of its own. The war with Argentina, for a start. So you will see—"

"What exactly happened, at Ituzaingo?"

"Nobody knows, for sure." Andrew gave a bitter smile. "There were not that many survivors. The simple fact is that the Brazilian army was routed by the Argentinians. Your cousin Ramon de Carvalho fell at the head of his troops. His son Duarte fell at his

side. Poor man, he was so riddled with consumption he should never have been in the army at all. But it was a Carvalho tradition, apparently."

"They have always served," Richard said sadly. "They have always commanded, eventually. And Duarte was Ramon's only son. But my God, Anne..."

"Is there still no news of her?"

Richard sighed. "I have had news. You will not credit this, but they are in Paraguay."

"Paraguay? But that is..."

"Another thousand miles away and more? They walked it. There is a colony of escaped slaves on the borders, maintaining themselves as a state within a state, owing allegiance to neither the Paraguayans nor to Rio. Oranatoon is their chieftain."

"And Anne survived?"

"Anne is his queen." Another sigh. "She is also the mother of his child."

"Anne? But she was—"

"Past the age, one would have supposed. But not barren, you know, Andrew. She had borne a child by him once before."

"Yes," Andrew said. "My God, Richard, I am sorry."

Richard gazed at his friend. For which one of us? he wondered. He shrugged. "That is the past. I will try to get word to her that her father and brother are dead, although it will be months before she can know. But finish your tale."

"Well, the disaster of Ituzaingo—losing to Buenos Aires, losing the Cisplatine Province—seems to have been what your cousin and Henry de Coimbra and their friends were waiting for. There had been rumors of a rift between them and the emperor before, of course, but no one took them very seriously, as they always appeared the best of friends in public. But suddenly, after the defeat had festered adequately, they seem to have visited the emperor, armed, with their own people surrounding the palace, and demanded his abdication in favor of the little prince. Within a week Pedro, and Queen Maria and the empress were on a ship back to Europe, while the crowd booed. 'Leave us in peace,' they shouted, 'and go and help your daughter yourself.'"

"There was no opposition at all?"

"None was evident."

"So little Prince Peter is now Don Pedro II," Richard mused.

"As of April, 1831. Under a Council of Regency, of course."

"Headed by Charles?"

"Headed by Prince Henry. But no one doubts that Charles is the controlling force. And the Council will be there for a long time, Richard. Pedro is barely six years old. They have kept the daughters there as well, the three younger ones; the eldest of them is only ten. So there can be no question of any of them marrying to suit their father. You have never seen a more broken man, as he boarded his ship."

"I can imagine." Richard got up, walked to the door, and looked down the slope toward the stream, where the young boys were playing their version of hockey. Prominent among them was his own eldest son, Elena's Sebastian. He was ten, too. "What does the rest of the family think of these developments?"

"Well . . . they seem wholeheartedly behind Charles. And whatever his faults, you have to admit that the company is thriving. Not through business methods you or I might care to use, maybe—one either pays, or loses, with Charles. But the fact is that the company is about the only truly prosperous concern in all Rio. He is very popular with the mob, who see him as their champion against the planters and the aristocracy. And then, of course, he has expanded his fleet, and modernized it. He now owns two steam-driven ships."

"I have never seen a steam-driven ship," Richard said wistfully.

"Well, they have sails as well, of course. The steam is only used during periods of calm, or to assist with windward work. But it does shorten time of passage."

"Aye," Richard said. "I can see that the family would be in his thrall."

"Richard . . ." Andrew got up, and came to stand beside him. "Your father is not well."

Richard turned.

"I do not know what it is. He is no longer young, of course."

"Has he asked for me?"

"I do not know."

"Had he asked for me," Richard said, "had mother wished me to come, they would have to have come to you."

"Yes. Then you will not go?" He sighed. "I think it would be safe enough."

"Despite Mrs. Grant's warnings? Do you see a great deal of her?"

"Well . . ." Andrew flushed. "She remains my main source of information."

"I see," Richard said. "Doesn't that place you in a vulnerable position?"

"My God, Richard," Andrew cried, "you entirely mistake the situation. We are friends. I sometimes think I am her only friend. She does not get on very well with your family. It is partly religion, of course, but also partly personal dislike, I gather."

"So you continue to receive invitations to dinner?"

"Not very often. The Grants are far too grand to wish to entertain a mere factor. But she occasionally stops by my office for a cup of coffee and a talk. Nothing more than that, I swear it, Richard. Would you go back, if they asked for you?"

Richard looked out at his cultivated fields, the acres of coffee, the cattle grazing in the pastures, his happy people, the trading sloop loading alongside the dock. He had created all this, where James Grant had been content just to sit and wait for others to come to him. He watched Sebastian running up the street, his *caoutchouc* ball racing in front of his skillfully handled branch. And he watched Elena coming toward him. She was three times a mother. And she remained one of the two most beautiful women he had ever known.

One. But she was the only one he possessed, or would ever possess now.

"No," he said. "I would not go. For me to reappear in Rio, especially a Rio ruled by my cousin, could only be disaster. El Dorado is my home. My empire. I shall not leave my people. And I shall die among them."



## PART FOUR



## Chapter 16

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"He was a great man," the bishop intoned. "Like his father before him, he was one of the pillars of Brazilian prosperity. We grieve his passing. But William Grant must have died happy, in the knowledge that his company, his family, his affairs, are safely in the hands of his nephew, that from his place beside the Almighty, he may look down throughout the coming years with confident anticipation."

"Damnable sycophant," Charles muttered to Prince Henry, standing beside him, then gave the Princess Félicité, next to her brother, a hasty smile. It was a part of his policy to remain at least superficially friendly with everyone in Rio, however Félicité might toss her head and look away. She was not angry with *him*, of course—her contempt was directed at Joanna, standing on his other side. She had wanted to be friends, and Joanna would have none of it. Joanna was a Boston prude. Charles supposed that summed her up very neatly.

The most maddening aspect of the situation, he often thought, was that his wife remained a most attractive woman. Her North American habits of moderation and exercise had enabled her to maintain her figure, where most Brazilian matrons bulged and quivered with excess weight. Nor had her face suffered; crow's feet at her eyes and a few streaks of gray in her hair were the only indications that she was not ten years younger—these, and an ever-present air of sad resignation. It was a

combination of many things, he knew. Loneliness, to begin with. He would not permit her to return to Boston even for a visit, and therefore she had not seen either of her children in years. Nor had he actually got around to building her a chapel of her own, and importing a Protestant minister for her. He had been warned by the bishop that such a step would be very unpopular, and now more than ever he needed personal popularity with the mob.

Joanna's problem was that she had no friends. She did not care for the upper-class Brazilians, who lived a life of purposeless over-indulgence which was utterly foreign to her nature, and although she had dutifully taken tea with Aunt Célestine and Inez every week for twenty years, she never felt at home with them, because Célestine, at least, supported her nephew in everything he determined to accomplish. And Joanna felt less at home with him than anyone else. Because she disapproved? Undoubtedly. She had not set out to marry a politician.

But she had *never* liked him, that was the point. She shared his bed whenever he wished it, but that was increasingly seldom nowadays, since he could obtain whatever sex he required at Madame Charmaine's. It was only a taste for physical mastery, and mental satisfaction, too, in enjoying her obvious distaste, that made him call upon her at all. There was no doubt that he hated her.

And now was the time to do something about it. Prince Henry had proved a broken reed. He did not seem to realize that, having come so far, there could now be no turning back, or even hesitating, upon the road. If young Don Pedro II were allowed to come of age—and he was now fifteen years old, so that event was not too far distant—or if the Princess Januaria were to marry outside of their control, they could well find themselves fighting for their very existences. And the matter was approaching a crisis—the princess was of marriageable age.

But Prince Henry continued to shilly-shally, to protest that he did not *know* that Anne was dead, and that it would be nothing short of disastrous to marry the princess and then have it appear that he was a bigamist. This was perfectly true. But it was also perfectly possible to make absolutely sure that even if Anne was still alive, she never reemerged from her jungle lair. The fact was that Henry was afraid to initiate any action that he could not claim had been forced upon him by fate. He

trusted in the fact that the exiled emperor would die before his son came of age, that Pedro II would not know the true circumstances of his father's abdication, and that he would never be able to prove that his Uncle Henry had ever done anything that was not strictly legal, and strictly necessary, for himself and for Brazil.

The fool did not understand that in this game it was all or nothing.

Well, Charles thought, *he* was certainly not going to risk a sudden upheaval that would reverse everything he had accomplished, and bring him tumbling down to the level of a mere shipowner again, assuming he was even able to hold onto the company. Unlike Henry, he had made too many enemies in recent years, and not only among those close to the court. He had no fears for his position in the country at large. In the south, and especially in the province of Rio Grande do Sul, he was the most popular man alive, judging by the reception he received whenever he visited São Paulo. But in Rio itself and the neighboring countryside, the planters he had dispossessed, the would-be rivals he had driven into bankruptcy, were all waiting for him to slip, just an inch, to be at his throat. He even suspected they might try to assist the process, and seldom went abroad without four armed men at his back; even today, his bodyguard lurked in the crowded cathedral, immediately behind him.

No, he thought; waiting, temporizing, *fearing* is the only mistake I can make. Boldness, decision, even temerity, must be the tools of my trade. And Uncle William is dead. The one man who might have opposed him in this final step, who might even have summoned up the specter of a disinheritance and a recall of Richard from the Amazon, was gone. He watched them all, surreptitiously, as they sang their dismal hymn. Father, of course, he could rely on. Hal Cutter was a broken man; almost his entire reason for living had vanished with the death of his friend and master Jack Grant in 1818. That left the women, and of the pair, he thought, only Inez counted. Aunt Célestine was nothing without her husband to bully and command, and her hatred for the son who had defied her had, if anything, grown over the years. Only Inez, with her international connections, her still-vigorous paintings, her obvious health and strength, her contemptuous curl of the lip, was of the mental stature to oppose him at all. But Inez was over

seventy years old, and with a weakling of a husband, she was hardly to be considered.

No, he thought, and once again glanced at the woman standing beside him. There was only one true obstacle remaining in the way of his becoming master of Brazil.

For once Cheyney was hesitant. "Dissolving a marriage is a very serious step," he said, walking beside his master in the rose garden, where they could not be overheard. "And after more than thirty years of marriage, and with two grown children, it is virtually impossible."

Cheyney was a Catholic, and had often guided his master from making any missteps in his dealings with the Church. But today he was entirely missing the point.

"My dear fellow," Charles said, "if it was simply a matter of divorcing Joanna, I would hardly be wasting time here with you. But I am sure you will understand that if I am planning to remarry, and make a princess my second wife, my eligibility cannot be in any doubt. Let us consider the possibilities."

"Well," Cheyney said, "I suppose the ideal situation would be for Mrs. Grant to die."

"She is as healthy as a horse," Charles said.

"Yes," Cheyney said thoughtfully.

And Charles slowly turned his head.

"Everything depends upon how badly you wish to end your marriage," Cheyney said, indicating that he had not, after all, missed the point, but had merely been waiting to learn what his employer had in mind. Charles looked at the grass over which they were walking. Joanna dead. No, no, Joanna dying, of a knifethrust, of suffocation with a pillow, those fine white limbs tossing in a last paroxysm of agony . . . He discovered he was sweating. It was a dream he had long held. But to make it happen . . .

"No doubt you have assessed the various ways and means," he said.

"Well," Cheyney said, "I know of a draught that induces a reaction like a virulent fever, and will certainly cause death."

"You have such a draught in your possession?"

"I know where you may obtain one."

"Where *I* may obtain one? You would have me put myself in the power of some black witch?"

"I had assumed you would administer the draught yourself," Cheyney said.

"The draught must still be procured. You are an amateur at conspiracy, Cheyney," Charles said. "You do not look beyond your nose. So I then hire someone to dispose of the witch, and am in *his* power, and then in the power of the person who disposes of him, and so on and so on."

"An accident. . . ." Cheyney suggested.

"Oh, really," Charles said. "If that is all you have to offer I had best abandon the matter."

Cheyney walked in silence for some seconds. They reached the end of the garden, and turned back to face the house. "There is, of course," he said at last, "one certain way in which a husband may dispose of his wife and even receive the acclaim of the community—providing the wife is unpopular enough, which Mrs. Grant is."

"You are babbling," Charles said acidly.

"A husband has certain rights," Cheyney continued. "A husband discovering his wife *in flagrante delicto* with another man is entitled to take immediate and drastic action. There is even opportunity for the injured husband to *kill*, and yet be considered very much the hero. Indeed, I cannot understand why your friend Prince Henry allowed such an opportunity to slip with regard to his wife. These Portuguese can be slow-witted."

Charles stared at him.

"A simple matter, really," Cheyney assured him, warming to his theme, "of placing a weapon in the villain's hand, immediately after death. If both parties are deceased, there will be no one to deny your story."

Charles sat down distractedly on a garden bench. Cheyney sat beside him.

"Joanna?" Charles asked. "You are assuming that Joanna *has* a lover. My dear Cheyney, she does not *like* it."

"Ah, but sir," Cheyney said, "does anyone know that, apart from yourself? The secrets a woman hides in her bosom are all but unfathomable."

"Joanna? She has never even looked at another man."

"Never?"

"Well. . . my God!"

"Ah," Cheyney commented.

Charles stroked his chin. "Andrew Cullen?"

Cheyney smiled. "You entertain him from time to time, and it is well known that she calls at his office occasionally."

"I had always supposed it was some sort of conspiracy

against me. It probably is." Charles snapped his fingers. "Such a development might just bring my cousin out of the jungle. My God, how I have waited for that!"

"I don't think anyone in Rio would be too surprised to learn that Mrs. Grant and Cullen were lovers," Cheyney said, sticking to the theme.

"Yes, but I'm damned sure they're not," Charles pointed out, "and never have been."

"Then isn't time they were?"

Charles gave him a pitying look. "I can't very well invite my wife to sleep with another man."

"They can be found in bed together, which amounts to the same thing, to the rest of the world. A dinner party, and a sleeping draught..."

"Not that again."

"It would be a love potion, which I would be prepared to procure for you. There can be no risk of criminal accusation there. It is well known that you and Mrs. Grant share few connubial joys. You have come to me with this problem, and I have undertaken to assist. The fact that the drug is also a soporific is neither here nor there. You will be innocent. Your wife will have been driven wild with desire, but not, alas, for you. I shall, of course, see to it that Cullen drinks your share by mistake. Then, after dinner, you keep them sitting up late, and send all the servants to bed. You are called away suddenly. We shall have to plan that carefully. It will be a false alarm, of course. But you are delayed in returning. And you have asked Cullen to keep your wife company until you return. And when you come back, why, they will both be asleep, and it will be your word as to what happened."

Charles chewed his lip.

"And mine, of course," Cheyney added.

"That was an excellent dinner, Mrs. Grant," Andrew said, and sipped his brandy. "It is very good of you, Mr. Grant, to entertain me, when I can offer so little in return. And when I am sure my company bores you."

He had clearly been confused all evening, at being the only guest. And by now, Charles decided, he should be even more confused, having imbibed a good dose of Cheyney's love potion in his coffee. He had yawned twice in the last five minutes.

"Quite the contrary, my dear Cullen," Charles said. "As I

have told you before, my wife and I enjoy an evening when we may talk English instead of Portuguese, and with someone who basically shares the same background as ourselves. Is that not so, my dear?"

"I always enjoy Mr. Cullen's company," Joanna said cautiously. She was equally bewildered. She had been utterly surprised when told that the Englishman was to be her only guest; it was years since Charles had indulged in such a tête-à-tête. And the potion she had drunk was also obviously affecting her. Her eyes were heavy and she breathed more deeply than usual. The moment would soon be at hand.

"And besides, Cullen, it is some time since you have brought me up to date about El Dorado," Charles went on. "Does all go well there?"

"To my knowledge," Andrew said. "It is two years since I have been up there myself, there is so much to be done at this end. But my letters from Colonel Grant tell me all is well. His coffee crop is certainly satisfactory. Would you not agree?"

"Oh, entirely," Charles said. "The best crop in Brazil. I am very pleased with Richard's efforts in that direction. But tell me, Cullen, why has he so resolutely turned his back upon us here in Rio? It is a very long time since that affair with the Princess de Coimbra, and now that she has abandoned him too, and once again run off with her black lover, I see no reason why bygones cannot be bygones. I know Prince Henry would be happy to bury the hatchet. It really was quite shocking that Richard should not have returned for his father's illness. You did tell him of it?"

Andrew stifled yet another yawn, and this time had to shake his head. Joanna was already asleep, sitting up in her chair.

"I did, Mr. Grant. But he found it impossible to leave El Dorado at that time. Sir, I beg you to forgive me, but I must take my leave. I cannot imagine what has come over me, but I am unable to remain awake. You will think me a very poor gentleman." He dragged himself to his feet, glanced at Joanna, then turned and fell headlong to the floor.

"Perfect," Cheyney said, opening the door. "Now, sir, where do you suppose a liaison would take place?"

Charles took out his handkerchief to wipe his brow. He found it odd, and most disturbing, that he, who had conspired against kings and emperors without a qualm, should be terrified at the thought of conspiring against his own wife. But then,

however often he had considered murder in the past, this was the first time he was actually going to commit the deed—and in cold blood.

“Sir?” Cheyney held his arm. “We must not weaken now.”

Charles tried to gather his thoughts. “The servants . . .”

“I have sent them all to bed. There is no risk of interruption. Now come, Mr. Grant, would your wife indulge in the drawing room?”

“Good heavens, no,” Charles said. “She would certainly take him upstairs.”

“I thought as much. Then, sir, if you will help me, we will take Cullen up first, and I can be attending to him while you see to your wife.”

Charles stooped and seized Cullen under the arms. The clerk held him by the legs, and between them they slowly carried him up the stairs. He was a large, heavy man, and it took them some time, but at last he was deposited on the floor of Joanna’s bedroom.

“Now,” Cheyney said, “if you will fetch Mrs. Grant . . .”

Charles returned down the stairs. He realized that he was taking orders without question, and was happy to do so. The thought of what was about to happen made him feel sick. It was all he had ever dreamed of doing . . . but dreams were not to be compared with reality.

He opened the drawing-room door, and gazed at her. She was slumped against the side of her chair, breathing heavily. He had not considered for a long time what a lovely woman she was. What a self-possessed woman. With what calmness and admirable restraint she had put up with her virtual imprisonment, for the past twenty years. And now . . . he drew a long breath, pulled her upright, lifted her, and carried her up the stairs. By the time he reached the top he was panting, could only dump her across the bed and gasp for breath, and stare in consternation at Andrew Cullen, already stripped naked on the floor.

“Now, sir, will you attend to your wife?” Cheyney said.

“Attend?”

“Mrs. Grant must be undressed, sir,” Cheyney explained with an air of great patience. “Otherwise it will look very peculiar.”

Charles knelt on the bed beside his wife, then hesitated, and glanced at the clerk.

Cheyney continued to smile. "I will leave the room if you wish it, sir. But you will need my help to arrange them."

Charles unfastened Joanna's buttons and slowly got her gown off.

"You may throw it on the floor," Cheyney suggested. "She would have undressed in haste."

Charles perspired as he worked at his wife's petticoats and corset, her stockings and drawers, slowly uncovered the delights that he had all but foresworn—because she would never allow him to possess them, he thought angrily.

"Her hair?" Cheyney suggested.

Charles pulled the pins from her hair, allowed the auburn to tumble about her shoulders. He had not done that since the month of their arrival in Rio.

"Perfect," Cheyney said, gazing at the unconscious woman.

"Let's get it done," Charles snapped. "I have been thinking, and I realize that since I have supposedly been out, I would be carrying only a single pistol, but no doubt a sword cane as well. So, a pistol shot for him, and a sword thrust for her."

"That will be admirable," Cheyney agreed. "But it cannot be done yet. We must arrange them first."

"Arrange them? What for, if they are both to be killed?"

Cheyney sighed. "Mr. Grant, think! The moment you kill the guilty pair, you will have to summon me, and I will have to summon your family and the watch. This is a great tragedy, the greatest tragedy ever to happen in Rio, considering the rank of the people involved. It is not something that can be swept under the carpet. Now, sir, consider. You rose from the table at ten-fifteen. You sat in the drawing room with your coffee and brandy, and at eleven I took it upon myself to send the servants to bed, as you were obviously intending to be late. Now, we have agreed that what will actually have drawn you out of the house was a noise in the garden, and that you therefore armed yourself and went to investigate. That is the safest story, as it involves no other person. You would have preferred Cullen to come with you, but he was obviously drunk. Outside, you were set upon by a footpad, and chased him down the road. At the end of the road, by the bridge, you lost your footing and fell into the stream. You were dazed, and it took you some time to recover. You must have been absent from the house, you see, sir, for at least two hours. Otherwise questions may be asked. Now, it is only just after midnight. You cannot

possibly complete the operation until after one. Their blood must still, shall I say, be fresh when the servants are called."

Charles scratched his head; he had described Cheyney as an amateur. "So we just sit here and look at them, for an hour?"

"Of course not, sir. You must go and wade in the river. With your clothes on."

"Is that really necessary?" he snapped.

"Well, sir, you must still be wet and dishevelled when we raise the alarm."

"And suppose they wake up while I am gone?"

"I am assured that this potion, once taken, induces sleep for at least three hours. In any event, I will remain here with them..."

"You?"

Cheyney coughed. "There are one or two other details to be attended to."

"Details? What details?"

"The bodies will certainly be examined, Mr. Grant. They are supposed to have been discovered in the act of sexual intercourse."

Charles stared at him. "And how do you propose to prove that?"

"You may leave the matter with me, sir," Cheyney said quite firmly. "Leave your weapons as well, and if they do wake up before your return, I shall attend to that also."

"You told me you would not commit murder," Charles snapped.

"Having come this far... but sir, I do not for a moment consider it likely to occur. On the other hand, I am strongly of the opinion that we should *wait* until they awake."

"My God! What now?"

"Should they be killed while asleep, sir, their faces will be calm, their bodies hardly contorted. Whereas if you allow them to awake, their faces will be distorted with fear and bewilderment at the sight of you—and of each other of course—and they will die with those expressions. Now, sir, we do not have all that much time. Will you help me arrange them?"

"Are you sure you haven't done this sort of thing before?" Charles asked.

Cheyney smiled. "Indeed not, sir. But of course, during my brief career in the law, I came into contact with several murder cases, and a study of them convinced me that in every case

the murderer was caught through lack of attention to detail." He stooped and took hold of Cullen's shoulders. Charles hesitated for a moment, then took the big Englishman's legs. Together they got him onto the bed and rolled him over so that he lay on top of Joanna. "You may leave now, sir," Cheyney said. "I will attend to the other details."

Charles stumbled down the stairs and out the front door. At this hour the dark road was deserted. There could well be a footpad waiting to assault him, and he was unarmed. But he thought he could strangle any assailant with his bare hands.

The idea of Cheyney alone up there, with Joanna, a naked Joanna, with the things he claimed he had to do . . .

And he was obeying the man without question! For he had reached the bridge, panting, running as if all the devils in hell were after him. And was now climbing down the bank. Because there was nothing else he could do. There was too much detail involved, too much that it was necessary to remember, too much he could not remember. Only Cheyney had thought it through from beginning to end.

And he had described him as an amateur!

He waded into the river, shivering, although it was a warm night and the water was not even cool. He drew a long breath, totally immersed himself, and slowly squelched his way back to the bank.

Of course it was impossible to stop now. His plans had been laid, and they could not be changed. That would be lowering himself to the level of Prince Henry. Joanna had to be disposed of. Had to be . . . He felt sick, sank to his knees on the bank, nearly vomited. He kept seeing her, lying there, while Cheyney . . .

He got up and began to run, his heart pounding. What fools they were. What fools! All this trouble, all this conspiracy, all this filth . . . he reached the house, ran up the front stairs, staggered across the hallway and up the stairs to the first floor gallery, and stared at Cheyney, who stood just outside the bedroom door, smiling at him.

"You made rare time, Mr. Grant. But perhaps it is just as well. They are just beginning to stir. I think, in another fifteen minutes, they may wake up." He handed Charles the sword and the pistol. "Remember, shoot the man, and lance the woman. That is the safest way."

"Listen," Charles said. "I have been thinking. It is not at

all necessary to kill them. We have been fools—utter fools. You have not thought deeply enough, Cheyney.”

The clerk frowned at him. “I don’t understand.” His expression indicated that he feared his master might have gone mad.

“Joanna is a Protestant. My God, she refused to accept the Holy Church, and she refused to have her children brought up in the Holy Church. Can that ever have been a proper marriage, in the eyes of the Church?”

Cheyney continued to regard him with amazement. “You are considering a very lengthy process,” he pointed out.

“Not so lengthy. Because if now she has also been found *in flagrante delicto*, as you have said . . .”

“You do not mean to kill them?”

“There is no necessity, now.”

“They will certainly deny that anything has happened,” Cheyney remarked.

“Can they, convincingly? They are in bed, naked together.”

“If you merely arrest them, Mr. Grant, they will hardly remain in bed, naked, together.”

“I will call the servants. I will have them surrounded. I . . .”

“Mr. Grant,” Cheyney said patiently. “I understand that this has been a difficult evening for you. But believe me, having embarked upon this course, it is the only one we can follow. They must die. Anything less would place us both at risk.”

Charles’s shoulders slumped. “I cannot, Cheyney. There it is. The man, perhaps. But Joanna . . .”

Cheyney smiled. “Well, then, Charles, you kill the man, and I will deal with the little lady. Give me the sword.” His smile broadened. “Then we will both be guilty—partners, for the rest of our lives.”

Charles stared at him, the true enormity of what had happened just dawning on him. Partners, for the rest of their lives. Partners with the purest villain he had ever encountered. For the rest of his life he would be at the mercy of this man.

“No,” he said.

Cheyney’s lip curled in contempt. “Oh, very well. Give me both, and I will kill them both.” He reached for the sword.

Charles shot him in the chest.

The bishop sighed as he took a turn up and down the cell, pausing once again to survey the woman sitting on the cot in the corner. She was fully dressed, but wrapped in a blanket; despite the heat in the Rio prison, she shivered incessantly.

Her hair was loose and untidy. He had never seen Joanna Grant with her hair loose, or indeed, looking anything less than utterly elegant.

"You must understand, my dear Senora Grant," he said, "that I am trying to help you. You must also try to understand the seriousness of your situation. Murder is a terrible crime."

Joanna shook her head, as if she would not even admit what he was saying.

"And you are undoubtedly an accomplice, senora. The fact of your having been caught in an illicit embrace with this Cullen makes you an accomplice. You were engaged with him in a dreadful crime against your husband, your family, your very name, when you were interrupted by this unfortunate man Cheyney, and Cullen seized his pistol and shot him through the chest, with you at his side. You did not attempt to stop him. You could think of nothing but your guilt. Senora, that makes you an accomplice before the fact. That makes you equally guilty."

"No," Joanna cried. "No! It did not happen. It could not have happened that way. It *could* not."

"But there is no need for you to fear the ultimate penalty," the bishop went on. "Your husband is showing a quite superhuman forbearance in this matter. He even feels sympathy for Cullen, whom he describes as a personal friend. But Cullen pulled the fatal trigger, after having dishonored Senor Grant's bed. He must suffer the consequences. For you, senora, for you . . . a simple confession, and no charges will be pressed against you. I have to say that Senor Grant has insisted upon an annulment of the wedding vows. Who can blame him? It will take time, and be a difficult task, but in view of the fact that those vows were actually celebrated in a Protestant church, and of what has now happened—well, I think His Holiness will discover sufficient cause for an annulment when the facts are presented to him. But if you refuse to confess, refuse to cooperate with your husband and the authorities, well then . . ." He shrugged. "What can we do? It would be an impossible tragedy for a lady like you, well born and married to the highest in the land, to confront the garrote."

"Father," Joanna said, having temporarily got her emotions under control. "Father, listen to me, I beg you."

The bishop sighed again, decided to ignore his sudden demotion, and waited.

"Andrew Cullen and I have never been lovers," Joanna said,

in a low, determined voice. "Listen to me," she said, as he opened his mouth to interrupt. "We are the victims of a most diabolical plot. *We* have been friends for a long time. But my husband has never been a friend to Andrew. Mr. Cullen is too closely connected with Richard Grant, *cacique* of the Amazon, a man my husband has sworn to destroy."

"My dear senora—"

"Listen to me. You may doubt that. Perhaps even Richard Grant and Andrew Cullen may doubt that. But I *know* it is true. And this tragedy springs from that hatred. Last night, we were drugged."

"My dear senora."

"*Listen* to me. We must have been given something with our coffee, after dinner. I fell asleep, sitting there, in a chair. I have never done that before. And the same thing must have happened to Andrew. And the next thing either of us knew, we were waking up to find my husband standing above us, and Cheyney dead in the doorway. That is the truth. I swear it."

"My dear senora, you woke up in bed."

"We were *placed* there."

"You were undressed. Both of you."

"Then my husband must have done it."

"The doctors found. . . male fluid on the inside of your thigh."

"It was put there," she shouted. "My God, you do not know the workings of Charles's mind!"

"And the pistol? Which had recently been fired?" The bishop allowed himself a smile. "That too was put there?"

Joanna sighed, and her shoulders slumped. "Yes."

"Senora . . ." The bishop sat beside her on the cot; it creaked ominously. "Can you tell me why I should believe you, to whom all the evidence points as guilty, instead of your husband, Brazil's foremost citizen?"

"Because I am telling the truth."

"Well, then, will you explain to me why your husband's clothes were wet, and his boots covered with mud, if he had not left the house to chase an intruder? Because this is what you are saying, is it not? That everything he has told us is a tissue of lies?"

"I don't know," Joanna moaned. "I don't know. But it was part of the plot—I know it was."

"You are suggesting that your husband has the mind of a devil from hell."

Joanna raised her head. "Yes," she said. "Yes, that is what I am suggesting."

"Accusations of that nature do nothing for your cause, senora," the bishop said severely. "But I am a fair man, and a patient one. Let us suppose everything you have said is true. Let us assume that your husband is the most blackhearted villain who ever walked this earth, and the most devious one, and the most savage one, and the most consummate dissembler. Let us suppose all those things. I would still like you to tell me why he should kill his clerk Cheyney, who had done nothing more than discover you in bed with another man. It can hardly have been rage at discovering himself dishonored, if he planned the whole thing."

"I—" Joanna clapped her hands together. "Of course, Your Grace. It was a necessary part of the plot, to get rid of me."

The bishop raised his eyebrows.

"Don't you see? He hates me. He has for years. I . . . well, perhaps I have not been a perfect wife for him. I know him too well. I fear him too much. And now he wishes to be rid of me. But how? He could not divorce me. So he created this artificial adultery, and for good measure, implicated me in murder as well."

"I see," the bishop commented. "He murdered his own clerk, his faithful companion of many years, in order to involve you, and now is moving heaven and earth to save you from such an involvement."

"Well . . ."

"When none of it was necessary, senora. Don't you understand?" The bishop's voice was almost kindly. "Your husband discovered you in bed with another man. Whether or not he placed you there in the first place, if he wished to be rid of you, he had the means at hand. A man is entitled to kill his wife, and her lover, if they are found together in bed. It would, I agree, have been the most blackhearted of all plots, for him to have drugged them and placed them in such a position, if they were truly innocent. But having done all of that, he would still be able to kill them, and claim his rights, because they would be dead and unable to deny it. And yet you are alive. And Andrew Cullen is alive. Can you explain *that* to me?"

"Yes," Joanna shouted, her cheeks pink with excitement. "Yes, I can. Because Cheyney must have discovered the truth. If he did enter the bedchamber, he would have seen us there,

lying on the bed, obviously drugged. He would have known we had not committed any crime. And then Charles came back."

"And saw him, and killed him," the bishop said sadly. "But left you alive. You, senora, you." His voice hardened. "In every breath that you draw, Senora Grant, you will convince the world only of your guilt."

"My dear Aunt Inez." Charles hurried forward, arms outstretched. "How very good of you to call."

Inez Cutter allowed him to kiss her on each cheek. "Célestine asked us to."

"Good of her. Uncle Hal, you are too kind. You'll understand that I really have not felt able to go out, these last few days. I have been far too shocked."

"Of course," Inez said. She entered the drawing room in front of him and sat down. Her husband sat beside her. "You are not looking your usual self."

"Well..." Charles sat opposite them. "I keep seeing—my God, in my worst nightmares, I would never have supposed Joanna guilty of... And with Cullen. A man I have always suspected to be a villain."

"Because of his association with Richard?"

"Well, they certainly committed a crime when they abducted the princess de Coimbra, did they not? But I was prepared to forgive. I offered Richard my hand in friendship. He preferred not to take it, except from a distance. But Cullen... I certainly befriended *him*, entertained him in my house—always against my better judgment, I may say. But Joanna liked him so. She said she liked being able to speak English. And I, fool that I am, believed there was nothing more to it."

"You have been through a ghastly ordeal," Inez agreed. "We are all most terribly upset for you, and filled with admiration at your forbearance. That is why we feel that, in asking you to be even more forbearing, we know we can do so with confidence."

"Eh?" Charles frowned at her.

"Joanna keeps asking to see you," Inez said.

"Yes, well, I have told her..." His frown deepened. "How did you know that?"

"His Grace has told me. He has been to visit your father, and spoken with all of us."

"About what? Joanna is not being the least cooperative. She refuses to sign a confession, persists in some cock-and-bull story which no one in their right minds could consider believing—"

"Of course," Inez said soothingly. "You have the sympathy of every right-minded person in Rio. But possessing that sympathy, can you not see your way to be generous?"

"About Joanna? Ha! She won't hang, if that is what is worrying everybody. They can lock her up for the rest of her life, but she won't hang. I give you my word."

"I never supposed she would hang," Inez said. "As for locking her up—well, His Grace feels that she is so convinced of her innocence that it is possible her mind has given way. She is apparently unable to accept what happened that terrible night."

"He could well be right," Charles agreed.

"So she will have to be cared for, for the rest of her life. Now of course, this is something I will be happy to do."

"Why should you involve yourself?"

"Charles, she is your wife. She is the mother of your children. And by her marriage to you, she is a Grant."

"Not for much longer," Charles said. "As for Bayley and Edith, I have written them, acquainting them with the facts of the matter. I doubt they will even wish to see her again."

"She is their mother, and your wife."

"Not for long. The marriage will be annulled. The bishop has assured me of this."

Inez drew a long breath, and Charles's frown returned.

"Well?"

"This is what is troubling His Grace," Inez said. "You and Joanna have been married for more than thirty years. There *are* the children to be considered, whether they wish to see their mother again or not. Joanna has committed a terrible crime, if everything that is alleged against her is true. . ."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"It has yet to be proven in court, Charles," Inez said quietly. "And as I have just explained, His Grace is convinced that *she* certainly believes in her own innocence, even if that is the result of dementia. What I am trying to say is, it is his feeling, and it is the feeling of all of us, that to ask for an annulment of the marriage, which will have the effect of making Bayley and Edith bastards, would be unnecessarily harsh. There seems

no reason for it. I mean, it isn't as if you were planning to remarry. Or..." She paused as Charles shot her a glance. "Charles?"

"You are asking me to remain married to a woman who has betrayed me, who has been a party to a terrible murder, who has never loved me—No. I want the annulment."

"Do you mean to marry again, Charles?"

He got up and walked away from them. "Of course not."

"Charles..." She in turn got up and stood behind him. "Look at me."

He turned. "Are you calling me a liar, Aunt Inez?"

"I am asking for a truthful answer to my question."

"And I have just given you one."

"Will you swear to me, on the Holy Cross, that you have no thoughts of remarriage?"

"You come here," Charles shouted, "badgering me when I am beside myself with grief—"

"You don't look very griefstricken to me," Inez said.

"You—How can I, or any man, possibly swear to something like that?" Charles demanded. He looked at Hal. "Could you, Uncle Hal?"

Cutter cleared his throat.

"You *do* have such a plan," Inez said, half to herself. "But my God, if you do... you could only do that after Joanna was dead. Or divorced. *Forced* into a divorce. My God!"

"What madness are you talking?" Charles demanded.

"I think I will have to go and discuss this with His Grace," Inez decided. "I think it may have an important bearing on Joanna's position. If you will excuse us, Charles."

Cutter stood up.

"Just sit down again," Charles said. "Neither of you is leaving this house until I say so."

They looked at him in surprise.

"You may as well know," Charles said. "My plans are for the Grant Company, and for Brazil. The company *is* Brazil. Without us—without me—there would *be* no independent Brazil. I made this country, and I intend to rule it."

"To... *rule* it?" Cutter asked.

"Yes," Charles shouted, "to rule it. Do you suppose that puling boy will ever be anything other than a puppet or a tyrant? Think of his father. Think of his grandfather. The moment he comes of age, it will be either the culmination or the eclipse

of the company. Well, I intend to see that it is the culmination, even if I have to become his brother-in-law."

"His—" Inez stared at her nephew in horror. "Oh, my God. Charles, you *are* mad."

"I'm the only sane person in this entire family," Charles said. "Now, you'll support me, because you always have supported me, and because you can do nothing else *but* support me."

"Support *you*?" Inez backed to the door. "I must have been mad myself. We all must have been mad."

"Stop right there," Charles said. He seized the bell rope and gave it a pull. "You'll not leave here until I have spoken with the rest of the family. With Aunt Célestine and Father. You'll not—"

Cutter went to the door and jerked it open. Three servants stood there.

"Stop them," Charles shouted.

"Get out of my way," Inez said.

The servants stepped back, and Charles gave a shout and ran forward, ripping a rapier from a wall bracket as he did so. Cutter turned and stepped in front of him.

"Now Charles . . ."

Charles thrust at him. The blade entered Cutter's chest with such force that it bent, as he gave a gasp and fell to the floor.

"Hal," Inez screamed, and knelt beside him. "Oh, my God. Hal." She raised her head. "He's dead! Aren't you going to kill me too, Charles? Because if you don't, by God I'm going to see you hang."

Charles stared at her for a moment, then at the horror-stricken servants. Then with a bound he leapt over the dead man, waved his people aside, and ran from the room.

"Where is Prince Henry? I was told I would find him here." Charles Grant stood in the main drawing room of Madame Charmaine's establishment, still panting from the fury of his ride into town.

"The prince is here, Senor Charles," Charmaine said. "But he is not to be disturbed."

"Nonsense! This is a matter of life and death." Charles hurried toward the curtain shutting off the inner house, pushing aside the two girls who had advanced to detain him. "Room Seven, is it?"

"But *senor*." Charnaine herself endeavored to stop him, and she was a large woman. "You cannot! Not today. Not—"

Charles hit her with the flat of his hand, a swinging blow that caused her to cry out as she staggered across the room and fell onto a sofa. Then he was through the curtain, hurrying up the corridor, hurling open the door of number seven, and recoiling in amazement at the sight of two people in the bed.

"My God."

Prince Henry threw his sister to one side, and sat up. "In the name of heaven—"

"Charles," Félicité cried, also sitting up. "How delightful of you to come!"

"You . . . Are you *mad*?"

"Now, Charles," Henry said, getting out of bed.

"Of course we are not mad," Félicité said. "We enjoy each other."

"There is a certain stimulation . . . Well," Henry said, "Life has only so much to offer, Charles."

"Yes," Charles said, and sat on the chair in the corner. "Yes." He got up again. "Well, get dressed. We are faced with a catastrophe."

"Catastrophe?"

"They have been pillorying me over Joanna's crime," Charles said. "My God, they have been at me! The bishop, my family . . . one would almost suppose *I* was the guilty one. And I lost my temper. I told Inez my plans."

"Your plans?" Henry asked, his color fading.

"*Our* plans," Charles said.

"*Our* plans?"

"Oh, for God's sake. To marry the Princess Januaria."

"You told your aunt that?" Henry shouted. "But there *are* no plans. I have told you that I would not, that I cannot, do it."

"Oh, not you." Charles waved his hand. "I was going to do it myself."

"You? But—"

"As soon as my marriage to Joanna is annulled. It would have been, you know, once the facts were presented to the Pope. But now—"

"You," Félicité cried, "mean to marry that *child*?" She gave a huge laugh. "How terribly droll."

"Get dressed, damn you," Charles said. "Don't you understand? Inez is probably on her way to the bishop now. Certainly the palace. We must act."

"We?" Henry demanded.

"I have killed Hal Cutter," Charles said. "I tried to restrain them, and he opposed me, so I ran him through."

"A one-armed man tried to restrain you, and you ran him through? What valor!"

"Yes," Charles shouted. "Yes, I ran him through. I killed the bastard. And I'd do it again. I'll kill them all, if I have to. Don't you understand, Henry? It is them or us, now." He flung out his arm, his finger pointing. "And don't suppose you can get out of this. If I hang, by God, you'll dangle beside me. And you, too, Filly."

"He's mad," Félicité declared. "Stark, raving mad."

"Listen to me," Charles said. "There is only one authority who can overrule the bishop, and that is the emperor himself. Now, we can act in the emperor's name, but only if we have him in our possession. If we act *now*, if we raise your people, Henry, and take over the palace, and seize Pedro and his sisters, then we can defy them all. Then we can succeed. If we do not—"

"Christ, that I ever became involved with you," Henry said. But he was pulling on his clothes. "We shall all be hanged. I know it."

Félicité also tumbled out of bed, and dragged on her gown. "But he is right, Henry. It is our only hope. And it *is* exciting. It is—"

There was a banging on the door.

"Prince Henry? Senor Charles? Are you there?"

"What is it, Charmaine?" Charles opened the door.

"There are some men here, Charles. They are soldiers, sent by the bishop."

"Oh, my God!" Félicité sat on the bed.

"We are finished," Henry said.

Charles chewed his lip for a moment, then snapped his fingers. "We have lost a battle, not the war. Charmaine, you must stop them. Any way you can, but delay them. We will use the back way. Send one of your girls to saddle your three best horses for us. Quickly, now."

Charmaine hesitated. "Why should I do this, senor?"

Charles grinned at her savagely. "Because, my lovely whore, if you do not, Prince Henry and I will have to come out there and fight those fellows. We will wreck your salon, and before I die, I swear I will cut your throat." He chucked her under the chin. "On the other hand, when I return as dictator of Brazil, I will reward you with ten thousand golden crowns."

"Ten thousand golden crowns?" Charmaine's eyes shone. Charles turned her around and patted her on the bottom. "So get to it."

She hurried from the room.

"For God's sake, aren't you dressed yet?" Charles demanded. "Make haste."

"Where are we going?" Félicité moaned. "Where can we go?"

"It is all or nothing, now," Charles said. "We are committed to civil war. We will go to the Rio Grande do Sul. I have support there. The people love me. And they are already grumbling against the empire."

"You will lead a revolt against the emperor?" Henry asked.

"And against your own family?" Filly cried.

"Aye," Charles shouted, his face glowing with passion. "Against them all. What are you afraid of? A little boy? An old man? That is who opposes us, nothing more. And a bishop. They will all fall together, when we return with an army."

Chapter 17

"So there it is."

Manuel de Andrade laid the paper on the table in front of him, and looked from left to right, somewhat nervously. He was well aware that for nearly ten years he had stood firmly beside Prince Henry and Charles Grant in their attempts to mold Brazil as they thought best. He had shared with them in the overthrow of Pedro I, and he had invariably voted with them on whatever controversial decisions had been laid before the Council of Regency. The fact that he was still here in Rio, when they had fled—and that he had sworn complete ignorance of any of their plans—did not necessarily guarantee his innocence in the eyes of the people around him.

He looked first at the Princess Januaria, who possessed all the haughty beauty of her family, and who had only yesterday been told that the man she called Uncle Charlie had actually planned to put aside his own wife and marry her, and who, if the catastrophe which hung over all Brazil actually came to pass, might still do so. She looked suitably outraged, suitably angry, and like everyone else around the table, suitably frightened.

All except the young emperor. Pedro now picked up the paper, scanned it, and snorted, his youthful face a glow of martial, and imperial, determination.

"So," he said. "Senor Grant and my uncle accuse my father

of the most disgusting crimes, and me of intending to follow in his footsteps. They accuse my government of inefficiency and corruption, and they accuse me of wishing to return Brazil to the level of a Portuguese colony. They call upon me to abdicate. They claim to have raised the entire province of Rio Grande do Sul against me. They say that within a month they will have five thousand men under arms." He glanced at Francisco Coelho, Ramon de Carvalho's successor as commander of the Rio garrison. "Is this possible?"

"It is possible, Your Majesty."

"He will have arms for this number?"

"Perhaps not cannon. But these are frontiersmen. They will have muskets and shot. And he will be able to raise a regiment of cavalry, I would guess."

"And can we not oppose them, and destroy them?"

Coelho glanced at the bishop, who sat next to Anthony Grant.

"Are you telling me there are not five thousand fighting men in Rio de Janeiro?" Pedro demanded.

"There are many fighting men in Brazil, Your Majesty," the bishop said. "But . . . where their loyalty lies, no man may be certain. You must remember that, due to our own weakness, Prince Henry and Charles Grant have virtually ruled this country for the past eight years. Nor must we forget that for generations there has been a strong republican element among our people, which has only grown with the success of the Spanish colonies in ridding themselves of European or monarchical domination. Senor Grant has issued a proclamation promising remission of taxes, a less severe criminal code, a diminution of governmental interference in trade. Such things sound very attractive to a hard-pressed community."

"But can they be more than empty words?" the emperor inquired. "Does a government not *need* money to govern?"

"That is true, Your Highness. And *we* may doubt whether Grant *can* implement such promises. But the vast majority of the people do not know this. They have learned to think that monarchy, by its very pomp, is an extravagance. When they discover that *any* government needs revenue, it will be too late."

"Because Senor Grant will be dictator? Are you telling me that I *should* abdicate, like my father, and meekly steal away, to spend the rest of my life in exile?"

It was the bishop's turn to glance anxiously from left to right. "I am but pointing out the strength of our enemy, Your Majesty. Be sure that if you ever leave Brazil, I will accompany you into exile."

"But you can think of nothing better to do," the boy said. He looked at Coelho. "And you, *senor*? Are your men also of doubtful loyalty?"

"My men are to be trusted, Your Highness. But they number only two hundred muskets."

"Well, then, the provincial garrisons—"

"Have declared for a republic."

The emperor's head bowed, and his sister Januaria squeezed his hand. He looked up at Anthony Grant.

"Well, *senor*, have you nothing to say? This is your son who leads a revolt against us. Your own son."

"I find it difficult to believe, Your Highness." Anthony spoke in a low voice. "I can only say that he is no longer a son of mine."

"To disinherit him now will scarcely save the country, or the throne," the boy pointed out. "Since he is your son, *senor*, and since it is on the Grant Company that we must place the blame for our present misfortunes, am I not right in also looking to the Grant Company for redress?"

"My son has conceded us one advantage, Your Majesty," Anthony said. "He fled Rio in such haste that he left us in possession of the Grant fleet."

"Oh, indeed," the emperor said sarcastically. "Of which two ships are presently in the harbor. And how may we use ships to fight an army?"

"It is possible to use ships to bring us an army, Your Majesty," the bishop said. He looked at Anthony. "The Grant Company also has the money to pay for suitable mercenaries."

"And where are these to be found?" Manuel de Andrade inquired.

"Where is Lord Cochrane?" Januaria asked.

"Restored to favor in England, Highness," Anthony said. "And Bolívar and Sucre are dead. O'Higgins is retired—"

"They were all dedicated to the republican principle, anyway," the bishop pointed out. "With such men we might well find the cure more dangerous than the ailment."

"So, shall we send to Europe for help?" the emperor asked. "Senors, by the time such an army can be raised, *if* it can be

raised, Charles Grant will be sitting in this chair."

Anthony Grant was chewing his lip. "There is help closer at hand, Your Highness."

"Well?"

"I have a nephew," Anthony said in a low voice.

"Richard Grant, by God," Andrade shouted. He turned to the emperor. "The governor of the Amazon, Your Majesty."

"Of course," the emperor said. "I have heard much about him. But—"

"He is a professional soldier, Your Majesty," Andrade said eagerly. "With much experience." He glanced at Coelho, who flushed and bit his lip. "He commanded Bolívar's cavalry, in the early campaigns against Monteverde."

"And now, so it is said, he commands a sizable force in the jungle," Anthony Grant said.

"And hates his cousin," Andrade added.

"Richard Grant," the emperor mused.

"You would seriously consider sending for such a man?" Coelho demanded.

"He is a total heathen," the bishop protested. "He permits the church a mission, but refuses to insist that his people be baptized or attend mass. He allows them to live in the most dangerous promiscuity, and shows them the way by possessing several wives himself. Is this the man we must turn to?"

"He is also a republican," Coelho remarked. "He defied your grandfather, Your Highness, and then went off to fight for Bolívar in Venezuela."

The emperor looked at Anthony Grant.

"He is a Grant," Anthony said stiffly. "He will not have forgotten his duty. He is as loyal to you, Your Majesty, as any man here."

"Indeed?" Coelho inquired. "Did he return here when his own father was dying?"

"We . . . we did not send for him. It was his mother's decision. But I am prepared to send for him now."

"And loose a thousand bloodthirsty redskins on Rio? That would be madness. They'd cut *our* throats, not Charles Grant's, then loot the city and return to their jungle."

"Their officers are white men, I have heard," Andrade said. "And follow Richard Grant as if he were a god."

"Bow and arrows, against muskets," Coelho sneered.

The emperor sighed. "I understand the arguments for and

against, senors. But it seems to me that it is a choice between risking having our throats cut, or fleeing."

"How soon can you get word to your nephew?" Andrade asked Anthony Grant.

"Now that the river has been charted, my ships can reach El Dorado in six weeks."

"And another six weeks back, plus at least two weeks for preparing his soldiers. Say four months."

"Four months," Coelho sneered. "Do you suppose it will take Charles Grant that long to get there?"

"Probably not," the emperor agreed. "Thus you must delay him, senor. Break down bridges and block roads." He smiled briefly at the bishop. "As we shall pray for rain."

"Indians," Coelho said, half to himself. "My God."

"But will these Indians *come*?" Princess Januaria said. "Will Richard Grant come? Why should he?"

"I can only explain the situation to him, and request him to come, in the name of the emperor," Anthony said.

"And you will do this?" the bishop demanded. "You will pit this fearsome nephew of yours against your own son?"

Anthony Grant sighed. "I gave Charles life. And I gave him power, which he has shamefully abused. I count the man fortunate, Your Grace, who is given the opportunity to atone for his mistakes."

"You have sent for Richard?" Célestine Grant glared at her brother-in-law.

"I am about to do so," Anthony explained. "The ship must leave today. We have no time to lose. It was decided that Manuel de Andrade should go, with full powers to negotiate. I would go myself, but—"

"I will go," Inez said.

They stared at her.

"I have no reason to remain here," she said. "And Richard will listen to me sooner than to Andrade."

"An old woman," Célestine sneered, "in the jungle?"

"I have made the journey before, Célestine," Inez said evenly.

"When you were a girl! My God, you are stark, raving mad. You are all stark, raving mad. Richard will laugh at you."

"He will come, if we explain the situation," Anthony said.

"If we restore him to his inheritance," Inez added.

Again they stared at her.

"There is nobody else," she pointed out.

"Never!" Célestine cried. "Restore that ingrate? Who would not even attend his father's funeral? Never."

Anthony sighed. "We did not send for him when William was dying. God knows, I understand how you feel, Célestine, now that my own son . . . Well, that is done. But not only is Richard the only hope of Brazil, he is also the only hope of the company. I accept your offer, Inez. But you must leave on this evening's tide."

"I shall be ready," Inez said.

"To combat a criminal you would raise the devil," Célestine commented. "You are all demented." Her head turned at the sound of a carriage.

"Ah." Anthony got up. "That must be Joanna."

"Joanna!"

"Well, of course, she has been released."

"After betraying her husband? After killing Cheyney?"

"Dear Célestine," Inez said, "Joanna is innocent of those crimes. By his actions, by what he said to me, by . . . by killing Hal and then fleeing, Charles has virtually confessed to that murder himself."

Anthony hurried to the door, opened it himself, and held out his arms. "Joanna!"

She hesitated. "Father?"

"Joanna!" He grasped her hands, and drew her into the house. "If there were some way . . . there is a way, of course. You will live here with us. You are my daughter."

"I . . ." Joanna gazed at Célestine, who started to turn away, and then checked as once again the sound of wheels filled the afternoon.

"That will be Cullen," Anthony said.

"Cullen?" Célestine cried.

"Andrew?" Joanna gasped. "Oh, but . . ."

"I felt the least we could do was invite him here," Anthony explained.

"But I can't see him. I . . ." She took a step, and had her arm seized by Inez.

"You cannot run away, Joanna," she said. "You should never run away again."

"But . . ." She faced the door, watched him come in.

"Mr. Grant." Andrew shook hands. "Believe me, sir. I understand your position."

"It is worse than you suppose, Mr. Cullen," Anthony said.

"My son has raised the republican standard against the emperor."

"My God! Then—"

"I am sending for Richard, and whatever forces he commands. He is our only hope, small as it is. Of course, I do not know if he will come."

"I will go, if you will permit me, sir."

"Well . . ." Anthony hesitated.

"We would be most grateful if you would accompany us, Mr. Cullen," Inez said.

Andrew seemed to notice the women for the first time. He looked at Inez, and then at Joanna, turned pale for an instant, and then flushed scarlet. The last time he had seen her they had been lying naked in each other's arms, unable to comprehend the disaster exploding around them.

Now she stared at him, her lips slightly parted.

"I . . . I trust you are recovered, Mrs. Grant," he said.

"Yes," she said, and shrugged herself free of Inez's grasp.

"I should also like to accompany this mission."

"You?" Anthony cried. "But, my dear—"

"Isn't my life also at stake, Father?" she asked. "If Charles succeeds in his rebellion, won't he dispose of me, even before the rest of you?"

"She is right," Inez said.

"Besides . . ." Joanna flushed. "I have been a prisoner for too long. I would like to be free. Will you show me this jungle paradise of yours, Andrew?"

"This is the happiest day of my life," Richard said. "How I have dreamed . . ." He embraced his aunt again, shook Andrew's hand again, and beamed at Joanna. "I trust our way of life does not shock you, Joanna."

"I knew what to expect," she said. "I envy you your freedom and your happiness." She gazed at him with wide eyes—the man she had come to see, the only man who might save Brazil from the dictatorship of Charles Grant.

"Yes, I have found happiness," Richard agreed. "You'll remember Elena, Aunt Inez."

"My dear girl." Inez embraced her niece. "You have not changed at all."

Elena smiled at her. "I am an old woman, Aunt Inez. I am thirty-eight."

"But you have not met Tulane, and Muldi," Richard went

on. "And the children. This is Sebastian."

There were several children, but Sebastian, who looked about twenty, was Richard's heir, and clearly a Grant. He had the height and breadth of his father and great-grandfather, but the ruggedness of his features was tempered by the beauty of his mother and his great-grandmother.

"Sebastian is the future," Richard said. "When I am dead and gone, Sebastian will rule here, and his sons after him. If he wishes."

His words suggested an unsaid difference of opinion here. Inez glanced from son to father, and Richard smiled.

"Sebastian is for freedom."

"Aren't we all?" Andrew said.

"There must be government. And there must be unity," Richard pointed out, and Inez watched the boy flush. And then smile, as his father clapped him on the shoulder. "But he is a Christian. He accepts the unity of the Church. Eh, Father?"

Father Paolo bowed. "He is more of a Christian than you have ever been, Richard."

"I'll not argue about that. You've not met Lieutenant Rorke, or Lieutenant Hall."

Like their master, these men were grizzled and experienced, in war as well as in life. Joanna felt a glow of confidence she had not known before.

"If we succeed in our mission," she asked Andrew, "will you return here to live?"

"Could you?"

"I . . . I do not know." They sat around the fire, and she could look at the men and the women, the children, listen to the babble of unintelligible conversation, look beyond the houses at the great trees, feel rather than hear the unceasing whisper of the greatest of rivers . . . perhaps this *was* paradise. But . . . never to see Boston again? Or her children? That was all she dreamed of, at this moment. Nearly all.

"I have never had to make such a choice," Andrew said. "I have the best of both worlds. I live in civilization, yet I am welcome here whenever I choose."

She gazed at him, her senses inflamed by the *piwarrie*, by the uninhibitedness of her surroundings. Yet there was nothing she could *say*. Her upbringing would not permit her.

And she was still married. She and Andrew had never exchanged a word of love, not even on the voyage here. He was too correct for that.

Yet as he looked back at her, she knew he understood. "Whatever we want," he said, "must wait on the success or failure of this mission. Otherwise, we have nothing to dream about, Joanna." It was the first time he had used her given name. And he was right. The success, or the failure of this mission, meant life or death for them all.

Richard was listening gravely to what Andrade, who represented the Council of Regency, had to say. He looked at Andrew, who nodded in confirmation. Then he looked at his people, innocently enjoying their meal, unaware that their fate was about to be decided.

"The council was unanimous in its invitation?" Richard asked.

"Not entirely," Andrade said. "There are those who fear the Indians and fear your power over them."

"And the family?"

Inez sighed. "Your mother can not forgive."

"I see." Richard gazed into the fire once again, then glanced at Elena, seated beside him.

"If you do not fight this cousin in the south," she said, "you will have to fight him in the north, eventually."

"Aye." He smiled sadly. Poor Thomas da Cunha had warned him that this day would come, but he had thought he could avert it by patience. "Once I dreamed of fighting him. When I was young. What a fool. He had the world at his feet."

"Then you will come?" Inez cried.

How they wanted him—how they needed him! But didn't he need them, too? He had turned his back on them thirty years before, in a mixture of boyish anger and guilt. The anger had soon dissipated. The guilt had remained, and even grown.

He had abandoned his birthright. When he had returned in 1818, he now knew, it had been with no real intention of resuming his proper station; taking Elena with him had been a reminder to himself that his heart and mind lay in the Amazon rather than in Rio. That fresh quarrel, together with the discovery that Anne so desperately needed him, had merely provided the reasons to do what he had wished to do, anyway. He had even pretended to himself that he was atoning for all his mistakes by allowing Charles to take his place.

As if a man could ever atone for his mistakes by proxy. To turn life upside down, a man must be prepared to go out and meet it, face to face. A man must *do*.

If only it were possible to do that without involving others in possible catastrophe.

"Richard?" Inez asked again.

"I doubt you understand just what you are asking," Richard said. "I have told you, I am slowly bringing civilization to my people. If that gradual process can continue, I have no fears for the future. But if I take my people to civilization, *en masse*, then I have lost them. Do not misunderstand me. They will follow me, and they will obey me. But El Dorado will never be paradise for them again." His mouth twisted. "Then they will wish for the freedom that Sebastian desires for them. And with it, they will destroy themselves."

Inez's shoulders sagged. "Then you will not come."

Richard sighed. "Oh, I will come. As Elena says, history has caught up with us. But I must make certain conditions."

"You have but to ask," Andrade said.

"I can muster only a thousand men and they are in no way trained to fight a European battle. If I come, I must conduct the campaign in my own way, and the European troops that the emperor provides must also obey my orders."

"I have the power to agree to that," Andrade said. "You will be supreme commander."

"I will require more people, however," Richard said. "I must have, in advance, an amnesty for anyone I may call upon."

"You have it," Andrade said.

Andrew frowned. "You are thinking of Oranatoon?"

"Aye."

"But—will he come?"

"He will honor his word to me. And he commands a considerable force."

"But can he come in time?"

"Through the forest, no. Given safe conduct to descend the Paraguay River, he can be in Rio Grande do Sul before us, if we send today."

"You have it," Andrade said again. "I have four blank parchments here, signed by His Majesty."

"His Majesty risks everything," Richard said.

"He has no choice."

"Aye." Once again he stared into the fire. "I can transport my men to Belém by canoe. But to take them down the coast, I need ships."

"Your uncle knows this. He is sending every ship he can find to Belém, to await your force."

It would happen, then, Richard realized. Once again he

would go to war. He would lead his Indians to their deaths, as once he had led his hussars to theirs. And like the hussars, the Indians would happily follow, because he was the *cacique*, the great chief. He had earned his power, and their loyalty, in combat.

Well, he supposed, he was about to enter another combat, for even greater power. But it must be the last one, or he would have failed. As he had known he must destroy Zak, so now he must destroy Charles. He could not afford magnanimity in victory. Even Bolívar had eventually come to understand that.

"Do you and the emperor and Uncle Anthony all understand, that if we come, it is to fight, and kill?" he asked. "We would come to destroy the enemies of the empire. You understand that?"

Joanna discovered that she was holding Andrew's arm, her fingers biting into his flesh.

"We understand that," Inez said.

Richard gazed at her for a moment, then looked across the fire at his son, who was watching him with shining, eager eyes. "Summon the chiefs, boy," he said. "I will speak with them."

"My God, but they are a terrifying sight." From the balcony of the palace, the bishop watched the Indians debouching from the dock and hastily crossed himself.

"On the contrary, Your Grace," Pedro II cried, "I think they are a splendid sight. And see how they obey their commanders? I wish there were more of them. But you say you have other men under arms, Colonel Grant?"

Richard nodded. "I have promised the support of a regiment of free blacks."

"Runaways," growled Francisco Coelho, commander of the Rio garrison.

Richard gazed at him. "They have been amnestied."

"Amnestied," Pedro agreed. "And I have wronged you, sir. You are *General* Grant, as of this moment. I think your people are superb."

"Pray heaven you are not mistaken," the bishop said, still peering down at the Indians milling about, staring in amazement at the houses and the shops, the sidewalks and the gas lamps. Rio had prudently shut up shop and battened its windows. Yet there could be no doubt everyone was staring from behind drawn curtains at these beings from another world who had

come to their rescue. The Indians carried bows and arrows and blowpipes as well as wooden knobkerries carved from the purpleheart tree, a wood almost as hard as greenheart, and far more attractive with its mauve tint. But their weapons and their numbers upset the good people of Rio less than their nudity.

"It is you who are mistaken, Your Grace," the emperor replied to the bishop. "Those people out there are Brazilians. Just as much as you or I, or anyone else who lives here."

"Just as much as the black slaves," Richard observed.

"Indeed," Pedro said.

"You speak anarchy," Coelho muttered. "Next you will be discussing emancipation for all slaves."

"That way lies disaster, Your Majesty," the bishop said. "You have only to look at the conditions of the British West Indies to realize that."

"They are all Brazilians," Pedro insisted. "Slave or free, they are Brazilians. You gentlemen mistakenly assume that a man must be either white or wealthy to claim citizenship. When those Indians march into battle alongside your regulars, Colonel Coelho, and with the free blacks in reserve, then we will have a national army."

Coelho raised his eyes to heaven.

"They have all disembarked," Richard said, "and time is short." He led the others back into the room, where they stood above a table covered with maps. "I would appreciate a résumé of the situation."

"It could hardly be graver," the bishop said. "Our only reason for hope is that your cousin is moving with extreme caution. But he has united the entire south behind him, and has sent envoys to Pernambuco and the north, calling for support."

Richard nodded. "After the failure of their last effort, they will wait and see. But they will not wait very long. The republican army?"

"We are told it lies outside the town of São Paulo. They have probed toward us, but Coelho's regulars have done wonders. You will explain, Colonel."

Coelho prodded the map. "We hold the river crossing, here, and here—with only a few men at each place, you understand, and mostly volunteers with a stiffening of my troops. Of course we have been assisted by the rains, which have raised the river levels. But it has not rained for two weeks, so we may assume

an advance in the near future. All my reports indicate that Senor Grant is assembling a vast force. I am told he has ten thousand men under arms."

"Clearly an exaggeration," the emperor said.

"We do not know that, Your Majesty," Coelho said. "They are being trained and equipped. He is buying arms from Argentina. We think he has come to some sort of arrangement with Dictator Rosas that Brazil will recognize Argentine possession of the Banda Oriental, following a republican victory. One thing is certain—he has cannon, and we have none."

Richard studied the map, and the room fell silent.

"The country is in our favor," he said at last.

"You think so? Ravines, hills, forests, rivers . . . it is a soldier's nightmare," Coelho said.

Richard smiled. "But as you keep reminding me, Colonel, my men are not soldiers. The moment Charles starts to move his army north, we have him." He prodded the map. "We will fight him here. It is a ford, rather than a bridge, and then the road passes through a wood. That is ideal. Pull your detachments back, north of the river."

"My God," Coelho remarked. "Such confidence! And we have only two thousand men, of whom half are Indians, to oppose ten thousand."

"The larger his army, the better for us," Richard said. "Even in three months he can hardly have turned them into regulars. And even regulars will, as you say, Colonel, find it difficult terrain for a battle."

"But suppose he delays his march north?" the emperor asked. "Did you not say that we dared not wait for victory?"

"We will not have to, Your Majesty," Richard said. "I have already commanded the three Grant Company ships available to sail around and bombard São Paulo. They will leave this afternoon. And we will leave tomorrow, for our positions. Now, if you will excuse me? I have a visit to make."

"There is much to be done," the bishop protested. "Your place is here, or in the field."

"We must know your plans," Coelho said.

"You are perfectly right," Richard said. "After tomorrow, I shall be in the field. And at that time you will know my dispositions. For tonight, I think I should call on my mother. I have not seen her for over twenty years."

Elena and Sebastian accompanied him in the coach, together with Joanna, Andrew, and Inez. Like Andrew, Sebastian had a command in the Indian army, but his men were bivouacked just outside the city, and it was a time for domestic matters.

"She knows we are here, of course?" Richard asked, as the equipage slowly rumbled up the road, the beach now on their left.

"Everyone in Rio knows you are here." Inez smiled. "Everyone in Brazil, I imagine. I do not doubt the news has even reached Charles."

"Aye." Richard looked broodingly out the window, feeling awkward as the vehicle bounced; it had been a long time since he had ridden in a coach. For Sebastian, it was the first time ever, just as the clothes he had hastily had made for him in Belém were the first that had ever covered his muscular brown frame.

The carriage had turned into the drive; the slaves were crowding forward as it came to a halt. The older ones could remember him; the younger ones had been brought up on legends of him. Perhaps they too expected to see a naked savage. They cheered their joy, reached for his hands, threw flowers at him.

Anthony Grant stood at the top of the stairs. He had been at the dock to greet the arriving fleet, but now he welcomed his nephew over again, embraced Elena, still awkward in her plain white gown, and kissed Sebastian on each cheek.

"Your mother is in the small drawing room," he said.

Richard nodded, walked through the great entry hall, and paused to look up at the galleries and staircases reaching above his head; servants were grouped in the pantry doorway to stare at him. All this was his now, as it had always been his, in fact. But never before had he felt any pride in ownership.

Yet to make it his, a blood price would have to be paid.

He opened the door. Célestine stood by the window, facing him. He was shocked at how old she had grown.

"I had expected to see a yardful of naked savages," she said.

"I would be honored, and so would they, if you would inspect them tomorrow," Richard said.

"I?" Her mouth twisted. "Do you suppose I support your cause?"

"I do not suppose that you can any longer support Charles, Mother."

"You left me," Célestine said. "You left your home, and your inheritance. You walked away from us all, to live in a jungle hut. You, my only son, walked out of my life. And you expect me to forgive you?"

"You mistake the situation, Mother," Richard said. "It is I who have come here to forgive *you*." He opened the door and beckoned to Sebastian. "Now I would have you meet your grandson." His smile was bitter. "If we are defeated in this campaign, you will not see him again."

Chapter 18

The mayor of São Paulo twisted his hat in his hands, and shifted nervously from foot to foot. He had lived most of his life in an atmosphere of peace. Whatever the traumas in Rio, the abortive revolts in the northern provinces, here in the south life had pursued a relatively even tenor. So much so, in fact, that the young men of his town, utterly bored, had volunteered in the hundreds for this republican army. The mayor was gratified. He agreed with republicanism. As the richest of all the provinces, São Paulo had had to bear too much of the taxation imposed by successive monarchs to pay for their wars and their courts, and if Senor Grant was indeed prepared to admit the error of his ways in supporting the emperor all these years, and could implement his promises that taxes would be reduced, then he could count on the support of the entire town council.

But no one had envisaged that São Paulo itself would become involved in a shooting war.

"The ships are there all the time, senor," he explained. "Their guns are firing all the time. It is driving people mad, senor, quite apart from the damage to our buildings. And it is preventing our business. The ships in port cannot leave, and those who wish to come in are driven away by these pirates."

"You have guns on the fort," Charles said. "Why aren't you firing back?"

The mayor shifted his feet a few more times, and glanced

anxiously at the officers standing around the tent, all clad in new blue uniforms, with shining swords and polished pistols. Never had he felt such a fish out of water, as he looked at the rows of tents, the stacked muskets, the horses, requisitioned from every ranch and plantation in the province and now being hastily broken in as cavalry mounts, the soldiers drilling, the five naked men tied to wagon wheels, their backs lacerated by the whip and now providing a feast for mosquitoes and flies—the whole atmosphere was foreign to his nature, And having the woman seated in the corner, her expression a continuous, contemptuous sneer, was an added annoyance.

“Well?” Charles demanded.

“Our guns are old, Senor Grant. There is not much ammunition. And they make so much noise when they are fired. The people do not like it.”

“They prefer to be bombarded?”

“They wish this campaign to be over, senor. They are grumbling.”

“Well, they will doubtless grumble more before they’ll grumble less. Tell your people to be patient, and to put up with the noise, and fire their guns to drive the ships away. We will shortly be on the march. Now leave us to our plans.” He waited while the mayor was hurried to his horse, then scowled at Prince Henry. “If you had acted with me in Rio, we could have seized the fleet as well, and this problem would never have arisen.”

“We also might have found ourselves on a gallows,” Henry pointed out. “The mayor is quite right. It is time we took the field. Our delay has been disastrous, to my way of thinking. And now that Richard is here—”

“With a few naked savages?” Charles inquired.

“Don’t underestimate your cousin,” Félicité remarked.

“Please leave military matters to us, Filly,” Charles said. “I am much more concerned about this report of blacks in arms against us in the south. I am damned sure they have come across the border from Paraguay.”

“You worry about a few blacks?” Félicité asked. “With an entire empire to conquer?”

“We will conquer nothing if there is a general slave uprising at our backs,” Charles snapped. “I am detaching a force of a thousand men to march to the south, to settle matters.”

“A thousand men?” Henry cried. “But—”

“Jorge Caetano will command. He is a good man, and he

knows the country. Stop worrying. A thousand men is not going to make any decisive difference to our strength. As for the rest, issue the orders. The army marches tomorrow on Rio de Janeiro. That will make the mayor happy."

"It makes us all happy," Félicité cried. "I shall tell my maids to pack."

"You," Charles said, "are staying here."

"I am not. Where you and Henry go, I go. Make no mistake about that. What, stay here and be murdered by runaway slaves, if you lose? I should think not!"

"Filly," Charles said, "we are not going to lose. How can seven thousand men lose to two thousand?" He smiled, and kissed her cheek. "But you can come along to see the fun, if you choose."

"Many men." The Indian crouched at the foot of the white men and drew in the dust. "Many." He etched a quick series of lines. "Men with four legs and big heads."

The Indians found it difficult to describe horses, for railroad had not yet brought any into El Dorado.

"How many?" Andrew asked.

"Many men." The Indian opened and closed his hands several times.

"And then?"

"Men with guns."

"Does he mean cannon?" Coelho asked anxiously.

"Big guns?" Richard asked.

The Indian nodded, and opened and closed his hand twice.

"Perhaps two batteries," Rorke commented.

"And then?" Richard asked.

"Many men, with little guns," the Indian said. "Many, many men." He seized a handful of dust, lifted it, allowed it to scatter into the air.

"That could be any number," Coelho growled.

"Aye," Richard agreed. "But it is the cavalry and the artillery that form the backbone." He straightened, and looked around him. The army had marched long and well over the past two weeks, the Indians, with their tireless lope, being able to match the poorly mounted horsemen of the dragoons from Rio; of the white and mulatto troops, numbering some fifteen hundred men, more than two-thirds were volunteers, and these had insisted upon remaining mounted—partly, he suspected, to

enable them to make a hasty escape from their Indian allies if necessary. Certainly there was no question of their fighting as cavalry—both they and their horses were untrained.

But then, with the exception of Coelho's two hundred regulars, such a criticism applied to his entire army.

And yet, he felt no reason for any lack of confidence. This was not the landscape for regular campaigning. It was even less suitable than Venezuela for the movement of large, disciplined bodies of men. They stood on a slight hill, which sloped down into a brief plain, across which the army was encamped; the volunteers were nearest at hand, the regulars to the left, the Indians toward the trees in the distance. But even the plain was crossed by a deep, quick-flowing stream, and ended in a sharp escarpment; below it, the stream formed a shallow lake, beyond which a marsh stretched for several miles. Then there was the forest, before the next river was reached. Here a detachment of the regulars was posted, as it had been posted for the last month, although when he had ridden forward to inspect them he had been disturbed by their emaciated, fever-ridden countenances. But they had held the ford, and there was no other way the republican army could come; inland were high hills reaching into small mountains, and seaward there was even more forest and marsh.

He looked at the sky, and the sun, drooping toward the western horizon.

"Have they set up camp?" he asked.

The Indian nodded. "They have small white horses, Great Chief," he said. "These are as many as the soldiers."

Richard nodded. "Good. Then, gentlemen, we commence our action at dawn."

"You'll attack seven thousand men, with two thousand?" Coelho demanded.

"My people know only attack," Richard said. "But I rely on yours for defense."

"What are we to defend?"

"We will operate," Richard said, "on the principle of the bee and the bull. We will sting this bull, then we shall show him a red cloak, which is easily swept aside, then we will show him a brick wall, which he will certainly be able to batter down, given time, but from which he will recoil at the first impact. This temporary check will only enrage him the more, so that when he charges again it will be with twice the fury.

Then we shall sting him again. And this time we will aim for the heart." He looked around them. "But it must be understood, that when a bee stings, it dies."

"How many?" Rorke asked. The Indians had been divided into four regiments, their commanders being Andrew, Rorke, Hall and Sebastian.

"One," Richard said.

"That will be mine," Sebastian said.

Richard bit his lip.

"That is nonsense," Rorke said. "This calls for an experienced soldier. The duty is clearly mine."

"If it is experience you require," Andrew said. "There is no one in this army with more experience than I."

"You have but to say, Richard," Hall said.

I have but to say, Richard thought. Loyal comrades, with whom I have lived for thirty years, and with whom I have fought and seen other comrades die. And whom I have led to the end of the world, and found paradise. Both Hall and Rorke had children and grandchildren, now, to replace those they had lost at Dadanawan. And the same went for all the other remaining hussars who held subordinate commands in the army.

But they had only a past, in reality. For both Andrew and Sebastian there remained a future, a future important enough not only to themselves, but to El Dorado and to the Grant Company and therefore to all Brazil. That was what command, authority, were all about: the ability to make the right decision, however hard it might be on the individual, when the good of the whole was taken into account.

"Captain Rorke is right," he said. "This is a task for experience." He smiled at Andrew. "I need your experience, Andrew. Captain Rorke, you'll be the sting. You'll move out before dawn. I want action to commence as the sun rises." He took Rorke's hand, and squeezed it. "I am sending you to your death."

The ex-sergeant major's rugged face broke into a smile. "I thought you were leading me to my death, Richard, in the charge at Dadanawan. That was twenty-six years ago. I'll be raising a glass to our victory, tomorrow."

The horseman panted. His mount was covered in foam from hard riding and was deep in mud to his knees.

"The ford is held, General," he gasped.

"By regulars?" Charles asked.

The man shook his head. "I looked through my glass, General. I think they are volunteers. I saw no uniforms. And their firing was wild."

"Could you see beyond the river?" Henry asked.

"Only a little way, Your Excellency. Beyond the river there is a wood. The road passes through that. But I thought I saw horsemen on the high ground to the right."

"Very good," Prince Henry said. "Rest yourself."

The scout saluted, and withdrew. Henry drank the last of his wine, and watched the sun sinking into the hills to the west. "It was reported, last month, that this ford was held by regulars. What do you make of it?"

Charles leaned back comfortably in his folding chair, and smoked a cigar. "Richard is up to some plan," he said. "When we reconnoitered this river last month, did we find another ford?"

Henry shook his head. "There are mountains to the west, and to the east the river floods into a swamp. Now that the river level has dropped, we can clear the ford easily enough, especially if it is defended only by volunteers. It is that wood behind, and the thought of Richard's Indians, that bothers me."

"It is the way we must go," Charles said, "unless we undertake a flanking march of several weeks. And I have my doubts as to the value of these redskins when it comes to real fighting. I'll wager none of them has ever seen a cannon fired in earnest. But we'll take no risks. We'll force the ford, to begin with, and on the far side we will give our orders to clear the wood. I have studied these matters, my dear Henry. An Indian arrow is effective only up to thirty yards; their bows are too small, you see. And these blowpipes which terrify you can hardly be used at more than fifteen *feet*. Now, the mere fact that there is a roadway through the forest, however overgrown, means that to attack us from shelter, which is the only way they know how to fight, they are already at maximum range for their missiles. If we maintain a disciplined perimeter, and take the advance slowly, sweeping the trees to either side with both musketry and ball, I think you will find that these Indians will be as effective as mosquitoes."

"No doubt you are right," Henry said. "And this is not the *Matto Grosso*. These trees are widely spaced, and the undergrowth is sparse." He smiled. "Forgive my nerves, Charles. I

cannot help but think that if we win tomorrow, then we have won the war."

"If we win decisively," Charles said. "If we can lay hands on Richard. I have that much in mind." He got up. "I'm for bed." He stood above Félicité's chair. "You will remain here with the baggage train until we send for you, Filly."

"I have no intention of being shot at," she agreed, and smiled at him. "You've no need of comfort, on the night before a battle?"

Her anxiety was pitiful. He kissed her on the forehead. "I shall feel more like it *after* the battle, sweet Filly. Come to me then."

He awoke to a flurry of frenzied noise, musketshots, screams, cries of dismay and shouts of anger.

He sat up and reached for his weapons just as his servant came gasping through the tent flap. "Senor," the terrified man shouted, "it is the Indians. There are thousands of them, thousands. *Aaaaagh!*" He landed on his knees, and then fell to his face, an arrow in his back. "Help me, senor. Help me."

Charles took a step forward, gazed at an Indian who filled the opening, brought up his pistol, and fired. The man collapsed, but judging by the noise outside, Charles would be risking death by going out through the front.

He turned, and with two cuts of his sword made an opening for himself in the rear of the tent.

"Help me, Senor Grant!" the man on the ground screamed, trying to reach the arrow with scrabbling fingers. But it was lodged exactly between his shoulder blades. "Help me."

Charles stepped through into the dawn—the first streaks of light were just emerging into the eastern sky—and into a scene of utter chaos: men running to and fro, firing their muskets and pistols, horses galloping in every direction, several of the tents in flames, and Indians everywhere. Another brave appeared in front of him, and Charles slashed desperately with his sword, sending the man reeling backwards in a flurry of blood. His brain tumbled. It made no sense! All his reports indicated that Richard had brought not more than a thousand Indians with him down the coast, and here he was, committing them to a dawn attack upon an army of six thousand men. It went against everything he had ever read or heard of warfare. It was a gambler's throw. But it was succeeding.

It could not! He ran forward, listened to Félicité screaming,

ignored her, and dashed toward the infantry encampment, where his more experienced men were forming some sort of a line.

"Don't shoot," he shouted, waving his hands. "Don't shoot. I am your general. Bugler! Bugler!" They opened to let him in, and he stopped, gasping for breath. "Sound the assembly. Haste, boy."

The bugle notes rang out, and then there came a cheer, and Prince Henry galloped by, leading more than a hundred horsemen, sabers flashing in the dawn light.

"Well done, Henry," Charles shouted. "Fix your bayonets. Follow me." He moved to the front of his men and led them through the camp. Now it was light enough to see clearly, a scene of utter devastation—scattered tents, discarded equipment, and dead and dying men.

"Cease firing," he shouted. "Bugler, sound the cease-fire. Regimental commanders, attend the general." He stood above a dead Indian, turned him over with his boot, and gazed at the cold features, the gaping bullet wound in the man's chest. "I want a tally of casualties," he said, "and of all the Indian dead. Quickly!"

Henry galloped up and dismounted. "That was a bold stroke." Charles nodded grimly.

"I told you not to underestimate Richard," Félicité shrilled, running toward them, a blanket wrapped around her nightgown. "Ugh! I've stepped in blood. There was a man in my tent," she said. "An Indian. Ugh, it was horrible. I screamed and screamed, and he ran away. Oh, my God..."

Henry took her shoulders and shook her. "It is over now."

"And to no purpose," Charles said.

"Bad enough," Henry said. "We have lost many of the horses, and I'll wager some of our people have run off as well."

"But the attack failed," Charles insisted. "Look at these dead redskins. Richard must have committed his entire force. And we are still here. Casualties?" He faced his captains.

"Some sixty of our people were killed, General, and perhaps an equal number wounded."

"And missing?"

"It is impossible to say, General. We are ordering our men now."

"And the enemy?"

"We have counted nearly two hundred Indians dead, Your Excellency, and three white men."

"What did I say?" Charles shouted. "It has been a catastro-

phe for Richard. It was a desperate, gambler's throw, and it failed."

"It is uncanny," the adjutant said. "I have heard of Indian fighting. They will only engage from shelter, using their bows and arrows. These people not only attacked, but stayed to fight."

"And have lost at least a fifth of their number," Charles said exultantly. "You may be sure the rest are still running. We have them now. Marshal your men, and move out. We shall assault the ford now, immediately."

"Before breakfast?" Félicité demanded.

"In warfare, my dear Filly, a general must know when to strike. We will breakfast when we have won the battle. We'll clear the ford."

"It will have to be done by infantry," Henry said. "I lack the horses."

"That is irrelevant," Charles insisted. "Colonel Teixeira, your regiment will lead the assault. Colonel Betancourt, you will be in support. Captain Vasconcelos, you will move your artillery to the riverbank to command the other side, and open fire. Prince Henry, you will concentrate on regaining as many of your mounts as you can." He clapped his friend on the shoulder. "We shall need your people to ride down fugitives, eh?"

Henry nodded, and wearily swung himself back into the saddle.

"General," Colonel Teixeira said. "The men are in a state of high excitement. May I recommend that we *do* have breakfast? It will give their ardors time to cool, allow them to collect their thoughts and remember their discipline."

"You are a fool, Teixeira," Charles said. "I do not *want* them to cool their ardor. They will fight better now than we could have expected. And the enemy is reeling under the catastrophe he has suffered. We advance now to the ford. To the ford!"

Richard Grant stood his horse on the high ground overlooking the ford and watched the republican encampment through his glass. Coelho and Andrew did likewise. Apart from half a dozen orderlies, they were alone.

"Brave men," Andrew said. "Brave men. I doubt many survived."

"Aye," Richard agreed. "Certainly Rorke did not. Yet he carried out his orders. You'll observe their infantry are forming a column. Senors, take your positions, and make sure your people eat. God knows when they will do so again." He wheeled his horse and walked it down the slope.

"Where will your positions be, General?" Coelho inquired.

"At the ford, to begin with," Richard said.

"At the ford?" the two colonels cried in unison.

"But if you are killed or taken—" Andrew protested.

"You will take command," Richard said. "You know my plans. But I am at least half of the bait, wouldn't you say? Now make haste."

At the foot of the slope he drew rein, and watched them spurring away to join their units. "You, Carlos, and you, Antonio, stay with me," he said. "The rest of you return to the main force."

The relieved orderlies rode after Coelho. The two he had selected regarded the scene with both pride and apprehension.

"Remember," Richard said. "We fight for Brazil and for the emperor. There is nothing to fear."

He walked his horse down the rough road toward the ford, where the two hundred volunteers, lying behind hastily constructed earthworks, stared unhappily at the river before them. They were entirely isolated, with open country between them until the trees were reached, stretching perhaps half a mile.

But they gave a ragged cheer as their commanding general approached, and Henry da Costa, their captain, came forward to salute.

"They are advancing, General," he said.

Richard nodded, and watched the infantry marching toward the ford on the far side; they were a brave sight in their blue jackets and white breeches, their banners flying, and their drummers setting the time. But he also noted that few of them were actually *keeping* time, and that they were constantly breaking ranks in their haste to reach the water, while they chattered to each other. He thought the word feverish aptly described their mood, which could hardly be better for the royalists.

But there were a great number of them, and they were well supported by at least three other infantry regiments that he could make out, while he also could see the battery of artillery moving to the left, or slightly upstream, from where they could throw their cannon shot across the water. The cavalry was

temporarily absent. There Rorke's marauders had done a good job. But their main task, and the entire object of their sacrifice, had been to induce just this mood of angry euphoria in the republican ranks.

He swung his glass to the left and made out the group of officers gathered on a slight rise, and watching him through *their* glasses. Charles was easily identifiable. Therefore so was he, and as he watched, he saw his cousin pointing, and the other heads turning.

"There are many men," da Costa remarked. "And the river is shallow."

"We must do the best we can, Captain," Richard said. He had not confided his plans to officers at this level.

"If those men could be brought up in support . . ." da Costa said wistfully, looking over his shoulder at the trees.

"They have their part to play, Captain," Richard said, "and will play it."

"Well, then, the Indians . . ." He hesitated. "If there are any left."

Richard smiled grimly. "Just play *your* part, Captain. I will tell you when to withdraw. Just play your part."

With a roar the first cannon exploded.

"Ah, what sport," Charles shouted, rising in his saddle as he watched the earth flying from around the royalist position. "See, look there." He pointed at where men could be seen streaming away from the earthworks, hurrying for the doubtful safety of the trees. "We have them. By God, but this is no battle. It is a rout."

He urged his horse forward into the water, beside the wading infantrymen, who were now cheering loudly as they saw the enemy running.

"Tell Captain Vasconcelos to cease firing," Charles commanded. "And prepare to bring his guns across. You'll advance at the double, Colonel Teixeira," he shouted. "We want to get those men before they can re-form. Do you see my cousin?"

One of his aides pointed to where Richard and Captain da Costa, the only two mounted men visible on the far side of the river, were slowly riding away, toward the forest, shepherding their men.

"God, if I had cavalry," Charles growled, snapping his fingers in anger. "Where the devil is Prince Henry?"

He looked over his shoulder, could see horses milling about

by the republican encampment. But there was no sign of their being brought into any sort of order yet.

"Ride back," he told one of his aides. "Tell Prince Henry that I need his people *now*. Every one he can muster. Now. Look at those brave fellows. Are they not magnificent?"

Teixeira's men had reached the far side, and were advancing toward the wood almost like a large force of skirmishers, running and shouting, pausing to fire their muskets whenever they chose a target, clouding across the meadow. And now the next two regiments had reached dry land, as Charles's horse and his staff also kicked the last of the mud and water from their hooves.

"Colonel Betancourt, take your men up with Colonel Teixeira. Clear me that wood."

Betancourt hesitated. "Last night, we spoke of advancing carefully through the trees, General," he said. "Maintaining a wide perimeter and searching the bush to either side with shot."

"Bah," Charles snapped. "That was when we had the Indians to contend with. They no longer count. If you are afraid to lead, senor, you may follow me. Waving his sword above his head, he raked his horse with his spurs to send it galloping forward. Moments later he brought the mount to a screaming halt, leaning back in the saddle with muscles straining on the rein as the trees in front of him exploded into flame and smoke. Teixeira's widespread infantry also recoiled, leaving several men on the ground.

"Those must be the regulars," Betancourt panted, as he drew abreast of his general. "They are entrenched."

"Bastards." Charles chewed his lip in anger. But Teixeira's men were streaming back toward him, and Betancourt's regiment had already halted, without orders, as had the two reserve contingents. "Sound the recall," he snapped. "Tell them to reform. And tell Vasconcelos to make haste with that battery. We'll teach Richard to play hide-and-seek with us."

He rode forward again, to greet Teixeira's men as they came back. They were flushed and panting with exertion, and angry at being stopped, while the sun, which was now high in the eastern sky, brought heat to the morning. They began to remember how hungry they were.

"The royalists seek to play games with us," Charles shouted. "We'll teach them who is playing games. We'll smoke them out."

The soldiers cheered, and pointed at the artillery caissons,

lumbering out of the river and straining toward them.

Teixeira saluted; he had been hit in the arm and had tied up the wound with a handkerchief. "There are several hundred men entrenched in those trees, General."

"And we are several thousand."

Teixeira nodded. "Nevertheless, their position is a strong one. It will take time to dislodge them. May I order my men to have breakfast?"

"Is food all you can think about, Colonel? I said we will eat when we are finished with this business. Those men will not stand up to our cannon, I promise you that. They will be swept away from there in fifteen minutes." He watched Vasconcelos arranging his guns, turning them toward the trees. "If necessary we will blow that entire wood down. Did you see anything of my cousin?"

"He rode into the trees with his people."

"Well, I am not going to eat until he is lying on the ground before me. You tell your men, Colonel Teixeira: breakfast after victory. Another hour."

With a whine and a crash a cannon ball tore through the trees, immediately followed by several more. Earth flew and branches cracked away, leaves scattered and a soldier screamed as a flying sliver of wood tore open his face.

"By God, what would I give for half a dozen cannon. Or even one," Coelho said.

"We came to fight with what we have," Richard said. "There is no use in complaining. Prepare to withdraw your men."

"They can stand some more of this," the Colonel objected.

"I do not doubt it. But our object is to fill the republicans with contempt for us. Pull them back."

Coelho hurried away to give the necessary orders. Richard dismounted, handed his reins to Antonio, and went forward with Carlos to the very edge of the tree fringe, where the regulars crouched in their hastily dug ditches. From here he could overlook the republican army: the cannon out in front, belching smoke and flame; the infantry grouped behind, no longer in any particular order, pointing and cheering as each ball thudded into the trees; the group of horsemen to the right, clearly Charles and his commanders. There was still no sign of any cavalry. Not, Richard thought grimly, that that mattered now. He had only feared the cavalry, as he had feared the artillery, in open ground. Once Charles drove his men into

these trees, the battle was as good as over.

A lieutenant crawled along the ditch beneath him, tapping the men on the shoulder, summoning them to withdraw. These were regulars, and they were reluctant; they had suffered some casualties, but mostly only wounded from flying splinters, and they were by no means daunted by the numbers opposed to them.

"Fall back, my good fellows," Richard said, walking along the edge of the ditch. "You are not running. It is only part of our strategy. Fall back."

A flying branch struck the ground before him, but he made himself keep still as he watched the regulars crawling away to form a column a hundred yards inside the wood, where the balls scarcely reached.

"We must go, too, Senior Richard," Carlos said.

Richard continued to watch. "We will stay until we are sure they mean to come after us. Get down, boy."

The cannon fell silent, and the infantry resumed their advance. They came on at a steady pace now, with organized skirmishers out front, the main body in line abreast behind, headed by their officers and their drums. He leveled his glass and made out Charles between the first two ranks; he certainly did not lack courage.

The skirmishers halted about fifty yards from the tree screen, confused by the absence of any shots. The infantry came up to them, stopped marching, and presented their pieces.

"Flat," Richard snapped, and threw himself to the ground. The volley reverberated across the morning, bullets thudding into trees and pinging as they ricocheted. Slowly the echoes died away, and for a brief moment there was silence.

"There is nobody there," someone shouted.

"They have fled," someone else cried.

"They have fled," the call was taken up.

Richard raised his head, watched Charles spur his horse to the front, waving his sword.

"After them! Scatter them! Make sure they are routed," he bawled. "And bring me Richard Grant."

The infantry gave a cheer, and ran forward behind a wall of bristling bayonets.

"Run for it," Richard snapped, and hurried through the trees, Carlos at his heels, to where Antonio was holding their horses. They swung into the saddle, chased by the cheers of the ad-

vancing republicans, and by the occasional bullet from a man who had thought to reload his musket. Richard galloped along the rough track that acted as a road, his aides at his heels, and reached the regulars, who had re-formed some quarter of a mile from the tree fringe. Coelho himself was here.

"Wait until they are close," Richard commanded, bringing his excited horse to a halt.

The republican infantry poured along the road, a huge mass of excited, exultant blue-coated soldiers. They saw the small force in front of them, and gave another cheer.

"Fire," Coelho commanded.

The musketry rippled through the forest, and several men fell, but the advancing soldiers did not even pause. They kicked their dead and wounded aside as they hurried on, bayonets thrust in front of them.

"Withdraw," Coelho shouted. "Withdraw. Run for it."

The regulars leapt to their feet and ran down the road, shrieking their fear—in more than one case, Richard suspected, genuinely enough. But now the main part of the republicans had entered the wood, and with them was Charles, galloping down the road, shouting his victory as he saw Richard.

"Ride for it," Richard snapped to his aides. "Carlos, sound the attack."

The boy nodded, raised the bugle to his lips, had time to utter only a single blast before a bullet tore him from his saddle, the back of his head ripped open, the brass trumpet catapulting from his hand.

Yet the single blast had been enough. Suddenly the close-packed trees were filled with Indians.

Unlike the soldiers, the men from the forest went to work without a sound. Their presence was indicated first of all by a hail of arrows, delivered from close range as they had lain in wait in the bushes beside the road. The suddenness, the silence, of this flank attack slashed into the republican ranks. The charging mass coagulated, watching their comrades tumble to the ground, gasping and shouting, aiming their muskets and in many cases clicking their hammers on empty chambers.

Colonel Teixeira rode into their midst. He was a brave man and a good officer, Richard estimated, watching from the now re-forming royalist ranks.

"Form square," Teixeira shouted. "Form square behind the

bayonets. Reload your pieces. They won't . . ." The words ended in a gasp as an arrow took him in the throat. He half turned, and stumbled from the saddle.

"Fire into those men," Richard commanded.

The regulars gave a cheer, stepped forward, leveled their pieces, and poured a volley into the disorganized republicans at close range, while once again a deadly arrow storm sang through the trees.

"We are lost," someone screamed.

"The Indians . . ."

"There are thousands of them!"

"There are too many . . ."

"We are lost . . ."

"Listen to me," Charles bellowed, spurring his horse into the mass of men. "There cannot be many. We destroyed most of them this morning. *Listen* to me. Sound the retreat," he bellowed at his bugler.

The notes sang out, and the men started to fall back, but now the royalist volunteers had been regrouped as well, by Captain da Costa, and they were also advancing through the trees, firing as they came.

"Fall back on the cannon," Charles shouted. "They won't charge the cannon."

"Now, Andrew," Richard shouted. "Now!"

As the republicans, abandoning any idea of forming a square—which had been their only hope of survival—began to edge away from their enemies, and from the trees that concealed so many fearsome surprises, the Indians left their cover and ran forward, armed with knobkerries and knives, closing with the horrified infantry before they understood what was happening.

"Now, Colonel Coelho," Richard commanded. "Bayonets will do it now."

The regulars fixed their bayonets, and dashed forward with a roar. The republicans, still outnumbering their enemies by at least two to one, became a disorganized mass of men, running every which way, throwing away their weapons, screaming and shouting for mercy. Richard looked for Charles, and saw him spurring his horse out of the trees and toward the supposed safety of the cannon. Here he stopped, with his immediate officers about him, watching his men trailing back toward the river in utter disarray, and watching the Indians he had thought

he had destroyed flooding out of the trees, being brought to order by Andrew and Sebastian and Hall. There was blood on their hands and scattered across their faces, and they had lost several men to the bayonets. But they had won.

There was still much to be done. Richard rode forward, the regulars marching at his heels. When he was within fifty yards of the artillery he raised his hand and brought them to a halt.

"You'll advance no further, Richard," Charles shouted. "My guns will blast your men into pieces."

"Surrender, Charles," Richard said. "You cannot fight an army with twelve guns."

"My people will re-form," Charles said.

"Do you really think so?" Richard pointed at where the river was black with men, some using the ford, the others throwing themselves into the water and swimming in their anxiety to be across.

Charles looked from left to right, and then down at the guns. Richard watched Colonel Betancourt talking to him in a low tone, watched Charles attempt to remonstrate and Betancourt become more vehement. By now his men had all but surrounded the artillery.

"I will give you one minute, Charles," he called.

"We can kill *you*, for a start," Charles shouted, urging his horse forward to stand alongside the gun pointing in his cousin's direction.

"One minute," Richard said, "or I will unleash the Indians."

Betancourt gave an order, and two of the gunners seized Charles's bridle, while two more held his arms and pulled him from the saddle.

"Let me go!" he shouted. "I am your general. I am your dictator!"

"Disarm those men," Richard said, and walked his horse forward.

Betancourt met him in front of the cannon. "I deliver this artillery, as I deliver our general, to you, Senor Grant," he said, and reversed his sword before handing it over.

"You, and my cousin, and this man—" Richard indicated Captain Vasconcelos. "—are rebels against the emperor and against the Empire of Brazil."

"We are willing to stand trial," Betancourt said.

"Oh, aye," Charles shouted. "We will stand trial."

"You have been tried," Richard said. "By order of the em-

peror, I am attorney, I am judge, and I am jury. You have been tried, and are guilty."

They stared at him.

"I have surrendered in good faith," Betancourt protested.

"You surrendered in an attempt to save your life," Richard said. "Did you not also kill many of my people in good faith? Would you not have hanged me, had you won, in good faith? I did not come here, I did not sacrifice my young men, to accept surrenders. I came here to destroy those who would threaten the peace and prosperity of this land."

"You cannot," Charles shouted. "You cannot execute me, Richard! I am your cousin. It would be murder."

"Since you are my cousin," Richard said, "and since you have surrendered, as you claim, Colonel, in good faith, you will be shot instead of hanged." He waved Andrew forward.

"You cannot," Charles shouted. "We are not alone. There are others who are equally guilty. Henry was with us. So was Félicité. They drove us on."

"And they will also suffer, when they are caught," Richard promised. "Take them."

The soldiers went forward, ropes in their hands.

"Fight me," Charles shouted. "Fight me with a sword. You are afraid of me, Richard. You know I would cut you down. Fight me, man to man."

Richard gazed at him. *Am I afraid of you?* he wondered, and knew that he was not. After thirty years of unremitting warfare against either men or the jungle, he could destroy Charles as he might a bushmaster, with a single blow of his sword.

Then why not do so? It would satisfy his own pride, complete their rivalry as it had begun.

But he was not here for heroics. To turn this into a personal quarrel, when so many men on both sides had died in pursuit of a larger issue, would make a mockery of everything he stood for. He had come to save Brazil, and that could only be done by treating his cousin, and his immediate supporters, as what they were, criminal traitors against their youthful sovereign.

He turned to Andrew Cullen, at his shoulder. "Shoot them," he said.

"But where are we going?" Félicité asked for the tenth time this morning, leaning from the carriage with her hair loose and

blowing in the wind. All last night and all the previous day she had asked the same question, while they had ridden to the south, seeking Caetano's command.

Now they had left the high plateau and once again were riding through trees, although the roadway was clearly marked. "Where *can* we go?"

"I have told you," Henry explained patiently, riding on horseback beside her carriage. His escort was down to four men; the others had deserted, and were probably back at their plantations by now. "The Banda Oriental. We will surrender to the Argentinians. Rosas will help us."

"Why should he?" she wailed. "Better to surrender to Richard. He is your oldest friend, Henry, and he has always had a soft spot for me. He won't let anything happen to us."

"If you think that Richard has a soft spot for you, Filly, you are an even bigger fool than you seem," Henry said. "Anyway, the Richard you remember no longer exists. He's spent most of his life in the jungle. He's an Indian now. Surrendering to Richard would be just a shortcut to hell."

"And Rosas will be better?"

"Yes," he said. "Rosas will be better. Rosas wants to end the empire as much as we do. Besides . . ." He tapped his saddle bag. "I collected some of the army's payroll before I left. Rosas will be happy to see us."

"I hope you're right," she said. "I hope—" The sudden braking of the coach threw her from her seat, and she landed in a heap on the floor, while Henry was all but dismounted by the rearing of his horse. The road was blocked by a fallen tree trunk, and suddenly they were surrounded by armed black men.

"Oh, Christ," he said, and pulled closer to the coach, as he watched the men approaching him.

"Prince Henry de Coimbra," a voice said.

Henry peered at the man standing next to his horse's head, a tall man, strongly built, who wore a feathered headdress, and feathers at knee and waist and shoulder, and carried a saber as well as a musket.

"You . . ."

"You have forgotten me, Prince Henry," Oranatoon said. "But I have not forgotten you." He opened the carriage door. "Will you not get up, Highness?"

Félicité stared at him as she slowly pushed herself from the floor. Her head swung left and then right, seeking some friendly face.

"Where is Colonel Caetano?" Henry asked.

"Dead," Oranatoon said. "And his men have dispersed."

"Then we are prisoners of war," Henry said.

"You are traitors," Oranatoon said.

"I have gold," Henry said. "That saddlebag is full of money, Ulysses. It is all yours, if you let my sister and me go free."

"You sentenced me once," Oranatoon said, "for having loved your wife. As she then became *my* wife, Prince Henry, you are guilty of the same crime. Therefore you will suffer the same punishment."

"You—you cannot . . ."

"No," Félicité screamed.

"Let the sentence be carried out immediately," Oranatoon said. "Take him away."

"You . . ." Henry's knees gave way, and he would have fallen had he not been caught by two of the men, who dragged him to the side of the road.

"Please," Félicité begged, and fell to her knees. "Please . . ."

"While you, Princess, always sought only to enjoy life, did you not?" Oranatoon inquired. "Well, then, you may die as you have lived. I give you to my men, for as long as they want you."

"You mean . . ." She looked from left to right, and a slow smile spread across her face.

"I mean that you can be theirs, as I was once yours."

Félicité threw back her head and gave a peal of laughter. "You think I am afraid of five men, ten men—a hundred men? You stupid savage, I will take you all, and spit in your face at the end of it."

"I am sure you would, Highness," Oranatoon said. "So when my men are finished with you, you will be strangled."

Chapter 19

Bells rang, people cheered. No one hid behind closed shutters now. The Indians had become heroes.

The boy emperor stood on the balcony of his palace to salute them, his ministers and his sisters beside him.

"Brave fellows," he said. "Brave, loyal fellows."

"By all accounts, Your Majesty, devils incarnate," the bishop said.

"The sooner they are on their ships and away to the north, the better," Manuel de Andrade said. "Is everything ready, Anthony?"

Anthony Grant nodded. "My ships are standing by."

"Your gratitude amazes me," the emperor said, then turned to face his officers as they came into the reception room behind him. "General Grant, I congratulate you. Be sure of our gratitude always, and of my reward, whenever I am able. My blessing on you all."

"We were fortunate," Richard said, "at least in the mistakes of your enemies, Your Highness."

"You will attend a council before you leave Rio, General," Andrade said.

Richard nodded at the emperor's chief councilor. "I am not leaving immediately. I have family matters to attend to." He looked at his uncle, who flushed, and lowered his eyes.

"You have other matters to answer for," the bishop said. "The council will sit now."

The emperor advanced to shake Richard's hand. "I, at least, am eternally grateful to you, General Grant," he said, "and will protect you insofar as I may. Be sure that your life is not in any danger."

"My life?" Richard looked from left to right, at the armed guards who had suddenly appeared in the doorways, at Coelho and Andrew, who stood beside him. Andrew looked as bewildered as he was. But Coelho smiled.

"If you will come in, General," Andrade said, standing by the door.

Richard hesitated, glanced at Coelho again, and at his uncle, and then entered the council chamber. To his surprise he saw that the Princess Januaria had taken her place at the head, while her councilors sat to either side. A chair had been reserved for him at the foot.

"Please be seated, senors," the princess said.

Richard remained standing. "May I inquire, Highness, why the emperor does not attend his own council?"

Januaria glanced at Andrade.

"It has been mutually decided, General," Andrade said, "by this council, that the emperor is far too young to be involved in affairs of state. He lacks the experience, and besides, it is much too great a burden to impose upon such youthful shoulders. Until His Majesty can be pronounced of age, we are fortunate in possessing, in the Princess Januaria, a regent who is in every way qualified for the difficult period that undoubtedly lies ahead of us."

"I see," Richard said. "May I ask His Majesty's opinion of this?"

"His Majesty regrets our decision, of course," the bishop said. "But understands the reasons for it."

"If you will forgive me, Highness," Richard said, addressing the princess. "May I inquire your age?"

Januaria's head came up. "You are impertinent, senor."

"I seek vital information," Richard said.

"Her Highness is nineteen years old," Andrade said.

"And his Majesty is fifteen. Is that so great a difference?"

"We are not here to discuss His Majesty's age," the bishop said, "or to resume a discussion which was concluded some time ago, when a decision was taken."

"In my absence," Richard said.

"I am not aware that you were ever a member of this council,"

the bishop said. "If you attended at all, it was in the capacity of commander of the forces of the empire, and it is in that capacity that we now call upon you to answer."

"To answer for what?"

Andrade cleared his throat again. "We have here a report from Colonel Coelho which alleges that you have conducted yourself with a lack of judgment and indeed humanity, much less justice, in your treatment of the defeated rebels. It is a sad and grisly tale of drumhead courts-martial and summary executions, which tarnishes the glory of your victory. Have you anything to say in answer to these charges?"

"A great deal." Richard glanced at Coelho, who had taken up his position just inside the door. "You write with greater urgency than you fight, Colonel. I must congratulate you. As for whatever I did upon the field of battle, Your Highness, senors—I have the written authority of the emperor in my possession."

"An example of His Majesty's incapacity for controlling his affairs," Andrade said. "That authority is no longer valid."

"I see," Richard said. "You will of course recall that I explained the necessity for such authority, and for the actions I intended to take, to you yourself, not two months ago."

"I am sure that Senor Andrade never believed for an instant that you truly intended to take such a dreadful revenge," the bishop said. "Is it true that you commanded the execution of your own cousin, when he had surrendered in good faith?"

Richard looked directly at Anthony Grant. "I ordered the execution of the enemy commander, the would-be dictator of Brazil, after he had surrendered, because his death, and the destruction of his forces, was my appointed task. I may say, senors, that he surrendered because there was nothing else he could do. I may also say, gentlemen, that I consider these proceedings irregular in the extreme, just as I regard the deposition of His Majesty, however temporary, to be an act of treason every bit as heinous as that I have just crushed."

"You . . . dare to accuse us?" the bishop shouted.

"We had intended leniency, General," Andrade said, "but if you persist in this defiance . . ."

Richard stepped backwards, knocking his chair aside as he did so. In a bound he was at the window, which had been opened wide to allow the afternoon breeze in, and was uttering a shrill whistle.

"Take him," Andrade shouted.

Coelho ran forward, to stop as Richard drew his sword.

"Executing you without trial, Colonel, will be a pleasure," Richard said.

"Are you mad?" the bishop shouted. "You cannot defy the supreme Council of Regency."

"Senors," Januaria said anxiously, "I do beg of you—"

"Down there, Your Highness," Richard said, "are seven hundred Indian warriors, under the command of my son. They are all watching this window, and myself. If I whistle again, or if by chance I disappear from this window, they will take this building and kill everyone in it. What they will then do to the city, I cannot say."

"You . . . you would rebel, yourself?" Anthony Grant demanded.

"Aye," Richard said, "for the good of Brazil. You gentlemen have mismanaged and misgoverned long enough. You placed my cousin and Prince Henry in positions of supreme authority, without possessing the wit to know where such madness must eventually lead. Now you would attempt to prolong your usurpation of power through the voice of an innocent girl. Well, I will have none of it. In your desperation, you sent for me to save you. I have done so, at the cost of nearly three hundred of my people. I do not propose to bring my warriors down the Amazon, ever again, in order to save the constitution of this great country. And the only way I know to ensure that I do not have to do that is to place the government of this empire where it belongs—in the hands of the emperor."

"Are you mad?" the bishop demanded. "A fifteen-year-old boy?"

"Who has more intelligence, more honor, and more determination than the rest of you put together," Richard said. "Senors, Your Grace, Your Highness—by virtue of my authority as commander of the armed forces of Brazil and by the authority given me by His Majesty, I now declare the Emperor Pedro II of Brazil to be of age, and to be the sole government of our country." He raised his sword. "Long live the emperor."

They hesitated. Then Januaria shouted, "Long live the emperor!"

The shouts rose to the ceiling, and were adopted by the crowds outside. Richard smiled at Coelho. "Escort his Majesty to his proper place at the head of the table, Colonel," he said. "And we will begin this council meeting all over again."

The family waited. If Inez was openly exultant, Célestine looked at her son as if he were a monster, and Anthony Grant sat by himself, in a corner of the room. Joanna stood with Andrew by the door, and Elena sat on a settee, with Sebastian at her side.

"I wonder at your moderation," Célestine said. "I had assumed we would at least be imprisoned."

"Sarcasm does not become you, Mother," Richard said. "And I promise that you will not have to look upon my face again. I have no intention of ever returning to Rio."

"But . . . the company?" Inez asked.

"Andrew will be President of the company," Richard said.

"Me? But . . ." Andrew glanced at Joanna, and squeezed her hand.

"I think you are the most suitable choice," Richard said. "I am sure Uncle Anthony has no objections."

Anthony started to raise his head, and then sighed, and shook it instead.

"I also think it would be best, Andrew, if you were to marry Joanna," Richard said, and smiled at them. "Supposing you both wish to."

"More than anything else in the world," Joanna said. "But—"

"Bayley will assume the management of the Boston office," Richard said, "subject of course to the authority of his step-father. Sebastian will remain here in Rio, to learn the business, and the arts of civilization."

"Me, Father?" the boy asked, and looked at his mother. "But I am your heir, the next *cacique*."

"Indeed you are," Richard agreed. "But you are also the next head of the Grant Company; thus you must be more than a mere forest-dweller. It is the Grant Company upon which all our strength is based."

"Do you really suppose you can make a businessman out of a half-breed?" Célestine inquired. "Or that Bayley will agree to work for your son?"

Richard sighed. "Sebastian will rule this family, Mother, when I am dead. As he is my son, and your grandson, and—" He smiled at his wife. "—Elena's child, I at least have no fears for the future. As for Bayley, he must make up his own mind as to where his best interests lie. And as for you, Mother, one day you will perhaps learn that hatred is no substitute for love. Now you will excuse me."

He left the room and walked through the great hall where the servants were anxiously gathered, aware that their future had just been decided, and into the small drawing room. Here Oranatoon waited for him. He had just reached Rio the previous night.

"Oranatoon." He embraced the black man. "I do not know how to thank you."

"Then do not," Oranatoon said.

"But this is no longer even your country, I have heard it said. Is it true that you have declared for Paraguay?"

"It is true," Oranatoon said. "A man can be free there."

"A man will be free here, eventually," Richard said. "It is not economically possible, at this moment."

"I understand that, but I do not sympathize with it. Yet I know a Brazil ruled by men like you and the emperor will be a better neighbor for my people than one ruled by Charles Grant and Prince Henry de Coimbra. I fought for my people as well as yours, Richard. I have no regrets. But now I must get home."

"To your wife and family," Richard said. "We heard that Anne had given you a daughter. Please convey my best regards."

"Not to Anne, Richard," Oranatoon said, his voice solemn.

Richard stared at him, his brows slowly gathering into a frown.

"She caught a fever," Oranatoon said, "a few months after the birth. There was nothing I could do." He sighed. "I could not tell you before, or by messenger. I did not know how."

Anne de Carvalho. Who had for so long fought with herself to escape the weight of her upbringing and her heritage. And who had left her escape too late.

For a moment the realization that she was dead could not penetrate Richard's brain. Then he was suddenly aware of a thrusting pain in his heart.

Anne, tall and vigorous, pulsing with life, desperate to break the social chains which had so firmly encompassed her—he had loved her as he loved no other woman. And because he had enjoyed her love so briefly, it had remained alive in him as a treasure lost.

He remembered how she had looked on the quarterdeck of the *Bucentaure* as they sailed into Rio...that magnificent morning in her mother's house when she had sworn to be his, just before catastrophe had overtaken them...the long voyage

up the Amazon when she had at last surrendered her reserve . . . that never-to-be-forgotten day at El Dorado when she had finally lain in his arms.

And the day her pride had reasserted itself, and she had left him. He had known then that she would not return to him, yet he had been sure they would meet again, in the comfort of their old ages, and remember.

Dear Anne.

"She had more than a few happy years," Oranatoon said. "With you, and then with me."

"With you, at least," Richard said.

"I know what you are thinking," Oranatoon said. "If she had stayed with you . . . she was not the age for living in the forest, for having children. Or for dying."

"No one is ever the age for dying," Richard said. "Tell me of your daughter."

"She is well, and will be a fine woman. She is cared for."

"Perhaps one day I shall have the pleasure of meeting her. As you and I will meet again, old friend."

"Yes," Oranatoon said, without conviction, as he looked through the open door to where Elena and Sebastian waited, with Joanna and Andrew beside them. "But you have much to do. This is *your* world, Richard Grant. You have made it so."